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The Lost Gold Raft;

or,

A Perilous Cruise For a
FLOATING TREASURE.

BY ROGER STARBUCK.



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THE LOST GOLD RAFT;

OR,

A Perilous Cruise for a Floating Treasure.

By ROGER STARBUCK,

Author of "Afloat in a Cannibal Ship; or, The Fated War-Sloop of the Ladrones," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A WICKED CRAFT.

"I DON'T like the looks of that craft, boys."

"She is not a pirate?"

"Not that I know of, but she has a wicked look."

"In my opinion she is a 'beach cruiser'—almost as bad as a pirate," said one of the two boys who had been addressed by the first speaker, Captain Truebolt.

These boys were the captain's son, Ben, a good-looking, fair-haired youth of sixteen, and his friend, Louis Harold, the latter a young naval mate of seventeen, on leave of absence from his frigate, the Spartan, now lying off Honolulu, Sandwich Islands.

He was a slender, dark-eyed boy, full of activity and energy, and was a passenger aboard the brig Tremont, of New York, which, it was intended, should touch at Valparaiso, where Harold had an uncle, his only living relative, whom he designed to visit.

The brig's cargo of general merchandise had nearly all been disposed of at Honolulu, and she was a home-bound craft.

The brig was the captain's own property, as also had been her cargo, and he naturally, therefore, felt somewhat uneasy, with the proceeds of the sale, amounting to some thousands of dollars in his possession, when he saw the evil-looking schooner.

Head winds had driven him rather nearer to the West Mexican coast than he desired.

Finding himself there, however, he had headed up toward the bold mountainous shores of the bay, to the north-west of Acapulco, now nearly concealed by an approaching fog, and was pointing out to his son the location in that direction of some property he had purchased years before of a rich miner, when from the mist emerged the suspicious craft to which allusion has been made.

Though not a large one she was long and low, and her enormous foresail and mainsail swept her swiftly toward the brig.

"You think her a beach cruiser, Harold?" said Truebolt.

"I do."

"Well, those fellows having no guns are not apt to molest anything larger than a fishing boat or Mexican sloop."

The schooner, however, came on.

When within half a mile of the brig, a puff of smoke rolled from her bow and a shot whizzed across the brig's fore-foot as a notice to her to heave to.

"That was a twelve-pounder," said Louis. "The fellow evidently means business of some kind."

"His decks I can see are full of cut-throats," said the captain. "I'll not heave to."

When the beachmen perceived that the brig kept on, a fierce yell rose from them.

Numbers of them could be seen in the fore and main rigging and an ugly set of villains they all seemed to be. They wore sou'westers, heavy boots and dark shirts; the belts about their waists contained dirks and pistols.

"I think they are some of the worst kind of their sort," remarked Harold. "Probably one of the coast gangs who waylay the smaller home-bound craft from the California gold mines."

The captain now crowded all sail, but the breeze was light and the schooner gained.

The twelve-pound bow-chaser, which, evidently, was her only gun, again sent forth its contents, and this time with sad results.

The shot striking the brig's spanker-boom, sent big chips flying from it, and one of these struck the captain on the back of the neck, near the base of the brain.

He fell, and, as both his son and Harold stooped to pick him up, he said, faintly:

"My head reels curiously. I fear it is all up with me!"

"Father! oh, father! it cannot be!" cried Ben, in great sorrow.

"Don't take on about it, Ben. After all, it's only a few years off my life, as I'm already past sixty."

"You must not die!" cried Ben. "You will recover!"

"No, I'll not. I'm going to join your mother, Ben, who is among the angels aloft. Good-bye, my boy!"

Ben wrung his father's hand, while he and Harold moistened his head with camphor and cold water, which the half breed steward, a sort of doctor, had brought up from the cabin.

After a moment's silence, the captain spoke again.

"I leave you all I have, Ben—the brig and the money in my state-room—five thousand dollars. Don't let those rascally beachmen get it away from you. And the property, Ben—the property on the coast bay, which I bought of the old Mexican miner—you may as well sell that for any trifle, as soon as you can. It will never be of any use to you. It is nothing but jungle and rock, with an old Spanish ruin close to the bay. It was once a palace, they say, but it is now nothing but a heap of broken walls and stones. Sell it, boy, sell it, and—"

Here he was obliged to pause. He gasped for breath and strove to say more, but suddenly his head fell back on his son's bosom.

"Dead!" cried Ben.

Speechless with sorrow did he gaze upon his father, while the crew, composed of ten sailors, also stood near, looking much distressed.

And now another shot came humming along from the schooner, without, however, doing any damage except the chipping of a piece off the gunwale of the dingey.

"Those devils are having things a little too much their own way," said Louis Harold. "Come, Ben, with your permission, I'll try to give them something in return."

"Ayl!" cried Ben, springing to his feet, with flashing eyes, "we must avenge my father!"

"We have but one old gun," said Harold, glancing forward at an old brass field-piece—a ten-pounder; "But I think you told me that, among your father's miscellaneous cargo, there were four small twelve-pound caronades and plenty of ammunition which he was unable to dispose of at the Islands. Be getting them up, Ben, while I serve the brass piece forward."

Ben at once gave the required orders, for his father death's made him, young as he was, captain of the little brig.

Meanwhile, Harold banged away at the beach cruiser with the gun forward as soon as he had obtained a supply of ammunition.

He fired with such good effect that the schooner's bow-chaser soon was dismounted by a well-aimed shot.

The vessel, however, now was near enough for her men to observe the small number of the brig's crew and she came on.

"We will stop your fun, my fine fellows," said Louis.

One of the caronades had been hoisted, and removing the gangway-board, Harold had the piece planted there.

It was soon loaded, under his directions, and he righted it, so as to bring it on a line with the lower part of the schooner's bow.

"Now, Ben, we will give them a shot that will hinder their coming nearer!" he said.

"Would that it would send their schooner to the bottom, with all on board!" cried Ben.

Harold fired and the well-aimed shot stove a hole in the bow at the water-level.

Instantly there was confusion aboard the craft.

She was brought round and headed shoreward, and a man was seen climbing over her fore-rail, with canvas in his hand, as if to make an attempt to stop the leak.

Ben quickly sighted the brass piece forward, after it was loaded, and fired, while his friend was preparing the carronade for another shot.

The captain's son had never had much experience with guns, but he had a correct eye, and it seemed as if his father's late cruel fate and his desire to avenge him had given wonderful precision to his aim.

The shot struck and instantly killed the ruffian, who was about to go over the bow.

Meanwhile, Harold was making the splinters fly from the schooner with the carronade.

Doubtless the craft would have been shattered and sunk by the two boys had not the drifting fog presently closed about both vessels so that neither could be seen from the other.

CHAPTER II.

THE TREASURE.

As the fog thickened, the breeze died away, and the brig lay becalmed. She was a small, neat-looking craft, of about three hundred tons, painted black, with the exception of a red stripe on each side, and her bow and run were gracefully curved.

Her wheel was of mahogany inlaid with ivory, her decks were white and clean, and her brass and steel work shone like a looking-glass.

But Ben thought little of the beauty of his craft now.

His father's lifeless form was on the quarter-deck, and an old sailor had already taken his measure to prepare the canvas in which he was to be shrouded for an ocean burial.

Hours passed and night came.

Ben could not sleep.

He walked the deck, as he would probably do all night, and Louis kept him company.

He tried to console him, but Ben shook his head and sadly said:

"You don't know, Louis, what a good father he has always been to me. Mother's death, years ago, brought us all the more together. I always accompanied him on his voyages. I have shared with him his perils, and we slept near each other. In fact, Louis, we were the closest—the best of friends—for he never laughed at my boyish ideas, as some parents do, but always sympathized with me."

"Ay, ay, Ben. I can understand your feelings," said Louis, grasping his companion's hand, "but don't let it cast you down, Ben. Remember you would have been separated sooner or later."

"Hark!" said Ben, suddenly. "What was that?"

"I imagine I heard a sigh," said Louis, somewhat startled, as he looked toward the motionless form on the bench.

Though there was a light in the rigging, the form was partly in shadow.

Ben quickly advanced to it and raised the canvas which had been placed over it.

Louis came to his side, and they looked down at the still face.

"No, of course that sigh could not have come from him," said Ben. "It was folly in us to imagine so."

"He looks wonderfully natural," said Louis. "I wish we had a better doctor aboard," he mentally added.

The steward, a half-breed Kanaka, served as doctor aboard this vessel.

Coming on deck while the boys were surveying the captain, he noticed them and quickly joined them.

"You are sure he is dead?" was the startling question Ben put to him.

"How could him help being, sir?" responded the steward. "You can see him cold. Him sure be dead."

"You are sure of that, Mauna?"

"Look at him. Him have dead look."

"True, true," answered Ben, "but the sigh we heard," he added, turning to Louis; "where could that have come from?"

"It must have been the noise made by the rubbing of that dangling rope against the brig's side," said Louis, indicating a rope that hung from a pin into the water.

"Ay," answered Ben, as he gazed over at the rope, "such must have been the case."

"We will not launch him overboard," said Ben, suddenly. "He shall be buried ashore, on his property, there by the bay."

"Why have you so decided?" inquired Louis, in surprise.

"I will tell you. He once said to me, while we were speaking of this property, that he would like to be buried there when he should die, if it were possible."

"But he expressed no such wish when he was dying."

"No, but I believe he would have had breath left to him long enough. I have been thinking that he was going to say so when he commenced to speak of the property."

"If you think so, by all means it should be done."

Just before daylight a breeze sprang up, and the brig was headed for the bay on which was situated the captain's property.

On finding himself nearing the coast the captain had, in fact, directed the craft toward that part where his land lay, that he might pay it a visit.

Little had he then imagined how soon he would be carried toward it for burial!

In a few hours the brig was opposite the bay.

Then the launch was lowered and the body, in a rude coffin, which had been prepared by the brig's carpenter, was rowed toward the shore.

All at once, when the launch was in the bay, a sudden violent squall came up.

In spite of all the efforts of the men, the boat was whirled against a sunken rock and capsized.

Louis and Ben hung on to the boat, and by obeying their directions the men who had got out on the rocks contrived to finally right it.

But the coffin had been swiftly carried off by a current into a sort of subterranean hollow in one of the rocks.

The crew pulled the launch upon a slippery platform of rock, where Ben had ordered they should remain until the squall was over.

But he looked about in vain for the coffin.

Its loss greatly distressed him. He and Louis advanced to the rocky hollow and peered down into it.

But it was deep and dark, and they could see no sign of what they looked for.

"It is gone. I have not even the satisfaction of giving my father's body a decent burial," said Ben, sadly.

The squall was of brief duration.

When it was over Ben had the launch pulled about among the rocks and continued his vain search for the coffin. As they searched, the crew found themselves close to the walls of the ruined palace, which bordered the shore of the bay.

The rocks extended close to a portion of the dilapidated wall.

Louis looked up at the walls of several ruined towers that flanked each side of the ruin.

"This has been a costly building," he said, to his friend. "It must have been habited by some one of the early Spanish grandees."

"Ay," answered Ben, "but I can take little interest in the place now."

"Let us look about," said Louis, "and we may yet find that coffin."

"You think so?"

"Yes, those old Spaniards were in the habit of having secret vaults and other underground attachments to their buildings. How know we but the hollow into which the coffin was carried may not lead down into one of these broken vaults?"

"It does not seem likely."

"We should have a long rope. With that we might descend into the hollow."

Ben at once ordered some of the crew back to the brig for a rope. Meanwhile the two boys walked about Ben's property.

It was a wild place.

But among the trees, shrubs, rocks and flowers could be seen here and there the remains of garden paths and fountains.

To distract his friend's thoughts from his father, Louis said:

"This property would be worth a great deal in New York, eh, Ben?"

"I suppose so."

"Out here, however, it would not bring much. Do you mean to sell it?"

"Such was my father's wish."

Soon after the boat which had been sent to the brig returned.

Ben and Louis at once walked back to the shore.

Followed by a few of the crew they moved along a ledge on the rock in which was the subterranean hollow.

On reaching the latter Louis took the rope from one of the men.

"I will go down there," he said.

"No—no, I will go!" said Ben.

"Suppose we both go," said Louis, "as you insist?"

"Be it so then."

Each of the boys took a turn of the rope and secured it about his breast under the arms.

They had taken off their hats, coats and shoes and tied them to their backs.

Into the current they dropped, and the rope being slacked by the men who held it they allowed themselves to be carried downward.

Down they in fact went, much swifter than they expected.

It made them dizzy from being carried along so rapidly.

Suddenly Louis cried out:

"Push against the side of the rocky wall, past which we are going, or it will be all up with us! In the dim light I think I can see a mass of rock under us, against which we will be dashed, lest we contrive to avoid it by pushing ourselves further out into the current!"

"All right!" answered Ben.

Both pushed against the rugged wall.

This carried them into the center of the stream.

It had a steep descent, and, as stated, the current was swift.

The boys were whirled like lightning past the rock, against which they would have struck but for their having pushed themselves further out from the wall.

A moment later they descended into a sort of rocky basin where the water was comparatively smooth.

It now ran slowly, and to their surprise they now saw ahead of them a large bricked archway.

"Halloo!" cried Louis. "So this place is connected with the ruin!"

"So it seems," said Ben, "and now—good God, what is that caught against the abutment of the archway?"

"It is the coffin, sure enough!" answered Louis.

The boys swam to it.

The lid had been smashed, and only a fragment of it remained.

The body of Ben's father was not in the coffin, though the latter was upright.

"It must have been spilled out," said Louis.

"Ay," sadly answered Ben, "but, if so, where is it?"

"We would not be likely to see it. It must have sunk."
 "We will look for it," said Ben. "It may have been carried along under this archway."
 The boys swam through the opening of the archway.
 They then found themselves in a sort of water-vault, at one side of which was a high flight of stone steps, leading up from the water. But they could not find the body.

Unfastening the rope from their forms, and securing the end to an iron projection in the wall, they mounted the steps for, despite his sorrow, Ben's curiosity, as well as that of Louis', was now aroused.

At the top of the steps they came upon a rusty iron door, studded with nails. They pulled at an iron attachment on it, and found it easy to open.

Then a cry of surprise escaped them.

They were now in a sort of paved vault, in the center of which was a circular opening, from which a heavy stone slab, that had formerly covered it, had mostly broken away, so that only the edges remained.

Above them, through broken floors of the palace, they could see the sky.

In fact, this part of the ruined palace was completely inclosed by the walls of one of the large towers they had previously noticed, but all was nearly open above.

The boys advanced to the aperture in the paved floor of the vault and looked down.

Then they gave utterance to a cry of wonder. About ten feet below them was a broad pool of water, not more than a fathom deep, so clear that they could see to the bottom of it.

There at the bottom of this clear pool they beheld jars of rubies, sapphires, emeralds, a few diamonds, gold collars, gold vases and images, golden sandals, golden crowns, and several small bags, the mouths of which being open, revealed gold grains and dust!

CHAPTER III.

A GHASTLY VISION.

So amazed were the two boys at the discovery of this treasure that for some moments they could not speak a word.

It was Louis who first make his voice heard.

"Ben, you are a lucky boy indeed. This treasure is on your own property. It all belongs to you!"

"Ay, and how fortunate I have not yet sold the place!"

"Yes, it is. Hah! Ben, I congratulate you! I am happy!"

Ben was overjoyed.

His eyes sparkled.

He trembled from head to foot.

"How much do you think all those things are worth?" he inquired.

"At least \$5,000,000, I should say," replied Louis.

"Five millions! Who ever thought I would be worth so much money?" gasped Ben.

"I never did," laughed Louis.

Then all at once a cloud fell over Ben's face.

"If my father had only known this in time, he might now be living and in the enjoyment of the fortune! It would have been the means of saving his life."

"How?"

"Don't you see? Of course, with such a fortune, he would not have been out here, in his brig. He would have retired on his money."

"Ay, if you take that view of the case, but might not he have met with many perils in trying to convey the treasure from here?"

"He might, but, of course, with ample means he could have taken every precaution."

"True. And now you must take every precaution in getting this treasure aboard the brig. How do we know that some of those beachmen may not be lurking in the vicinity of the ruin at this moment?"

"Ay, a good watch must be kept. The main question is how shall we remove the valuables from so singular a place as this?"

As he spoke, Ben looked up at the ruined walls of the tower.

"There should be some door or window in the lower part of these walls," said Louis.

He made the circuit of the wall, but he could discover no means of exit.

In fact, the tower had been built upon a lofty rock whose sides were perpendicular and the vault was an excavation in the rock.

The lowest part of the wall, from its top to where the friends stood, was at least fifty feet high.

Louis measured the distance with his eye.

Then by means of a strong, trailing vine, that hung down into the vault on the time-worn sides, he climbed with some difficulty to the top of the wall.

Looking beneath him, he perceived that the rock on which the tower was built was on one side near the summit, composed of limestone shells and earth, in which many climbing parasites had taken root.

Straight down to the sea, however, on all sides descended the elevation, so perpendicular that it could not be climbed, while, at its base, the water was composed of rushing, foaming tides that would not admit of a boat being brought to the place.

Beyond the tower, on the land side, opposite the channel, between it and the rock, were lofty, wooded cliffs, that shut out the view in that direction, while the higher part of the wall obscured the sea from the youth's gaze.

Louis descended, as he had mounted, by the vine.

"We cannot get the treasure off by way of the wall summit—that

is certain," he said to Ben after he had described the locality outside.

"Then the only way is to have a few of the treasures at a time drawn out by a rope through the hollow by which we entered."

"That would be the only way," said Louis, "if we could do it."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, that I cannot see how we are now to quit this place."

"What!" cried his startled companion.

"It is best to 'look the fact in the face,'" said Louis. "We cannot be drawn out as we came. The foaming, tumbling torrent, which describes a pretty sharp descent, as it goes down under the rocks, would, of course, blow over and suffocate us ere we could be drawn back by the crew."

"What in the name of wonder are we to do, then?" cried Ben.

"Ay, that's the question."

"Of what value is all this treasure if we can never get it out?"

"Yes, and still less its value if we ourselves can never get out!"

Ben was greatly impressed by this startling truth.

It seemed as if the treasure had only been revealed to the boys to show them the insignificance of earthly riches in comparison to human life.

They were still talking over their strange situation when all at once they faintly heard shouts, with which was blended the report of firearms.

These noises were probably outside of the rock containing the hollow through which they had descended.

"The beachmen!" cried Ben, turning pale.

"Ay," answered Louis, "they have probably attacked the boat's crew—have stolen upon them unawares."

"We are in a difficult situation, then," said Ben. "Alas! it is all my fault. In my eagerness to look for my father's body, I neglected proper precautions. I might have suspected that those ruffians, after the punishment we gave them, would try to steal upon and attack us. As it is, I fear my poor fellows will all be killed."

"Let us hope not," said Louis. "They would have the rocks to shield them from any shots as they pulled off for the brig."

In fact, the noise of the firing soon ceased.

Then suddenly there was a crash, followed by a shriek of agony.

"What on earth was that?" cried Ben.

"God only knows."

"It sounded like the fall of a tree."

"Yes, it did. Hah! I have it! One of those rascally beachmen must have cut down a tree, thinking it would fall over on the launch and swamp it as our escaping men pulled past the wooded promontory of the bay."

"And that awful shriek?"

Louis sadly shook his head, as he said:

"I am afraid they succeeded, or, at least, partly succeeded in their purpose. The tree, as I take it, struck a portion of the boat, and one of our men was probably mortally hurt."

The boys listened, but they heard nothing more for some minutes.

Then a noise like the rush of an avalanche saluted their ears.

As it seemed to come from the direction of the subterranean hollow, they retraced their way to the bottom of the steps that rose from the water basin.

The rushing noise continued for some minutes.

Then the young seamen beheld an awful sight.

Borne along under the archway, into the water basin, came a floating tree, containing numerous branches.

It was the scraping of these, as the tree was borne into the subterranean hollow, that had produced the rushing sound the two friends had heard.

And now, caught among those branches, to which his form was held by entangling vines that covered the tree, was one of the ruffianly beachmen.

The man was dead.

A spear, which had been hurled with unerring aim, had passed clean through the body, impaling it to a thick branch of the tree.

"That's Mauna's spear!" cried Ben, "and the Kanaka must have hurled the weapon."

"So it would seem. But how came the tree to give way?"

"You can see it has been torn by the roots from the ground," said Louis. "A squall—a tempest of some kind—must have risen about the time our men were attacked. This man had climbed into the tree probably to get a good shot at the fugitives."

"You may be right, Louis. I can think of no other explanation. I wish I could know that our men are safe."

The boys stood looking at the dead ruffian.

In his belt, besides a pistol, there was a hatchet.

"That hatchet and that tree may be of use to us," said Louis, as the boys were dislodging the body from the branch.

They possessed themselves of the spear, the hatchet and the pistol.

Anxious they were to remove from their sight that horrid form, with its staring eyes and set, rigid features, showing the intense agony the ruffian had suffered ere he died.

Finally they rolled it off the tree into the water with a loose stone, which they had obtained from some scattered about the vault, tied to it to make it sink.

Down then went the dead body with a hollow gurgle into the deep water of the cavern.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAFT.

Having rid themselves of the body of the beachman, the boys stood looking at the tree.

"It is a mystery to me," said Ben, "how so big a tree, with so many branches, could have been drawn down through the hollow in the rock by the torrent."

Louis leaned over and looked closely at the tree.

"No," he said, "there's nothing strange in that. The tree is a yew, and the branches readily yielded to the pressure of the sides of the rocky hollow, giving way so that the tree could pass through."

"Ay, sure enough. The branches of this tree can be bent, or easily compressed."

"Ben, I have an idea."

"What about?"

"About that water chasm, under which are the treasures. How know we that there may not be some secret way of egress from the place down in that pit?"

"We should go down and look. But where are we to get a rope?"

"There is the rope by which we were let down through the hollow by the men," said Louis, pointing to the line where the two boys had previously made it fast.

"But it may have been fastened above, outside the hollow, by the crew, ere they left the place—if they have left it, as we suppose."

"You can be sure it was loosely tied, then," said Louis.

Seizing the rope, he pulled upon it, and it almost at once gave way. The scraped strands at the other end, when it was hauled in, showed that a turn had there been taken with it about some sharp rocky projection.

Having secured the rope, the boys returned to the vault above.

Louis made one end of the line fast to an iron spike in the wall.

"I will first go down," he said.

He tied the rope about his breast and descended into the chasm.

At the bottom, when in the water, he looked about him.

"Good!" he shouted. "I think it is as I thought. I see a broad passage, which probably leads outside the rock. I will take a swim in that direction."

Unfastening the rope from his breast, he struck out.

But he had not gone far, when he discovered that the passage terminated in a rugged wall.

In this, however, he saw an iron door, the lower part of which was but a quarter of an inch above the surface of the water.

The feeling of a draught of cool air, coming out beneath the door, convinced him that there was an opening beyond, by means of which this cavern could be quitted, provided the door could be opened.

He got his fingers through a crevice of the door, and strove to pull it open.

But he could not do so.

Again and again he strove in vain.

Then he set out on his return, and finally joining his friend, made known to him his discovery.

"Perhaps we could get that door open with the hatchet," said Ben. Louis reflected.

"Ben," he said, "I have in mind a good plan. We will make a raft of that yew tree and put your treasures upon it. Then we will float along to the iron door, and try to open it with the hatchet."

"'Tis the best we can do," said Ben. "At any rate, we will make the raft and put the treasure upon it."

They at once commenced operations.

The hatchet was a sharp one with a broad blade.

They first lopped off the branches from the tree and dragged them up into the vault.

This occupied some time as there were many branches.

Then they proceeded to cut the trunk of the tree.

They made logs of it in the first place, of the requisite length, and with a rope drew them up into the vault.

Close to the edge of the chasm did they now fashion the timber for the raft.

Before night they had the raft half finished.

The darkness compelled them to pause in their work.

In fact, they needed rest.

Hours had passed since they tasted food and their labor had weakened them.

They sat up long talking over their singular situation.

At last, making pillows of their jackets, they lay down side by side.

It may have been a little past midnight when Ben opened his eyes. Was he dreaming, or did he really see a black figure in the gloom, standing a few paces off and glaring at him with big, burning orbs, that gleamed like stars through the darkness?

He sat up and rubbed his eyes.

No, he was not dreaming.

There was the dim outline of a lean, dark form, standing motionless, apparently gazing toward him and his friend.

"Who are you?" cried the startled boy.

But as he spoke the figure moved away and vanished.

Ben awoke Louis and told him what he had seen.

The two boys looked about them in all directions throughout the vault, but they could discover no person nor any sign of one.

"Then your fancy must have deceived you," said Louis.

"No, it did not," answered Ben. "I saw the outline of the form and the gleaming eyes. I am sure of it."

"Well," said Louis, "if there is any one in this vicinity, I wish he would leave us something to eat!"

He spoke in a loud voice.

"Come," he added to Ben, "we will now go to sleep again." But Ben had not his friend's faculty of treating a mysterious affair of this kind so lightly.

He lay awake the rest of the time preceding daylight.

Then Louis also awoke, and both boys rose.

Great was their astonishment to see a supply of food lying near them!

It consisted of a loaf of black bread, some of the black roasted beans, which form a peculiar dish of the country, and a small bunch of bananas.

"Ay, ay, now, that proves you were right," said Louis to Ben, "that you really saw some one, as you said. Come," he added, "let us fall to. I am half starved."

"And I, too," said Ben.

They ate the provisions so mysteriously furnished them, and felt much strengthened.

"Who, in Heaven's name, can it be that is near us?" cried Ben.

The two boys scrutinized the door and the walls closely, but they could discover no secret door or entrance.

That there was one, however, now seemed evident.

"These old Spanish palaces abounded in curious retreats, I have heard," said Louis. "However, as we cannot find the person we have been looking for, we may as well go on with our raft."

"First we will call on our strange visitant to come forth and tell us how to leave the place. He may know of some easy way to quit it."

"Undoubtedly," answered Louis.

But though the boys called again and again, no one made his appearance in response to the summons.

Much puzzled, they continued the forming of the raft.

They had all the rope for their purpose, and had soon tied some of the logs and shaped branches firmly together, forming a long, tolerably strong raft.

With some of the thick vines taken from the walls they made it still stronger.

Then, with a piece of rope they had secured for the purpose, they lowered the raft into the water of the chasm.

Getting down upon it, they drew it along a few feet away from the part of the water over the treasures.

"Now for those jars and pots of gold and gems!" said Ben. "How are we to get them up?"

"Easy enough! I will dive and fasten the end of the rope to them, and you can haul them up."

Seizing the end of the rope, he dove and tied it to a jar of rubies.

This Ben hauled up and placed on the raft.

Then Louis dove again and tied the rope to a jar of golden crowns. This was so heavy that Louis had to get on the raft to help his friend pull it up.

And thus, one after the other, the treasures were raised and placed on the raft.

To this they were fastened with the remains of the rope, and also with some of the strong, supple vines.

To facilitate their ascent from and descent into the chasm the boys had left a vine dangling into it from the spike in the wall.

Their task of getting up and securing the precious articles to the raft was now completed.

With admiration and delight did they gaze upon gleaming gold collars, crowns, and the gold grains and dust.

Though dim was the light there, the flash of the emeralds and rubies seemed to shed increased radiance about them.

And now they drew the raft along to the iron door. Through a crack at one side, they could see an opening leading to the outside of the rock.

There they beheld the tumultuous, foaming waters at the base of the rock on which the tower stood.

"Even if we got there, do you think we could float the raft through those foaming waters?" inquired Ben.

"God only knows."

"Dreadful it would be," said Ben, fairly turning pale at the thought, "to have the raft go to pieces there, and so lose all these things."

"Ay!" answered Louis, "no diver could ever recover them, if they once sank among those eddies and tides!"

"We will open the door, at any rate, if we can," said Ben. "We can fasten the raft in the channel leading to the opening, even if we can do nothing else."

"And we can then try to think of some way to get it through those roaring waters."

With the hatchet the boys tugged and tugged to open the door.

But all was in vain.

They could not make the least impression on it.

Discouraged and disheartened, after they had vainly worked for hours, they drew the raft along back to the bottom of the chasm, made it fast and ascended to the vault.

"What are we to do?" inquired Ben.

"We are in a bad fix," said Louis.

"Ay!" said Ben. "What good to me are all these treasures if I can never get them away from this place?"

"True enough. But don't be discouraged, I have hopes that that same mysterious person who furnished us with our food for to-day will soon appear and act as our guide from our strange quarters."

Wearily the two waited.

Hours passed.

The darkness of night came again.

The two had thought that at least they would hear the shouts of their shipmates, calling to them at the hollow.

As they did not, they feared the worst—that the brig had been attacked and captured by the beachmen.

Night came and finally they dropped to sleep, though they endeavored to keep awake to watch for the mysterious visitant. So soundly did they sleep that it was late the next morning ere they awoke.

Then the thought flashed in the mind of each that the food he had partaken of had somehow been drugged.

This suspicion they believed confirmed, when on going to the edge of the chasm and looking down, they discovered that the raft, with all its treasures, had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO RUFFIANS.

FOR some moments the boys looked at each other, as if unable to credit their senses.

A sort of howl of dismay—of grievous disappointment escaped Ben.

"Gone! The gold raft—gone!" he cried.

"Ay," said Louis. "Depend upon it, the fellow you saw was a rascal—perhaps one of the beachmen, and that it is he who has made off with the treasures."

"That does not look as if he was a scoundrel," suddenly and in a hopeful voice, cried Ben.

He pointed as he spoke toward a bunch of bananas and a couple of loaves, which the boys had not hitherto noticed, lying in a hollowed part of the wall.

"Cheer up—cheer up, Ben!" said Louis. "He may prove a good friend to us, after all. Here is, at least, two days' supply of food."

"Would that he'd come and tell us what he has done with that raft!" cried Ben.

Then he took off his shoes, and telling Louis he was going to look for the raft, he descended to the water.

Louis followed him.

Both boys swam to the iron door, and looking through the crack at the lower edge, they uttered a cry of surprise.

In fact, they now saw the raft lying, with all its treasures apparently untouched, made fast by a piece of rope to a rocky knob on one of the walls of the watery channel.

They shouted—they pounded at the door, but no one came to open it.

More puzzled than ever, they swam back to the chasm and climbed up into the vault.

They partook of some of the food which had been left for them.

Again they waited, as on the day before, hoping that the mysterious visitant would come to them.

Another day and night passed.

The boys, after waking in the morning, swam to the iron door and again looked through the crack.

The raft was no longer in the channel beyond the door.

"Ay," cried Ben, fiercely, "this proves that the strange being, whoever he is, must be a thief! He has made off with the raft."

To their surprise, they now perceived that the iron door yielded when they pulled at the edges.

Open it swung and they swam into the channel.

This was smooth at first, but as they proceeded, so swift was the current, drawing them along toward the white water and eddies beyond the opening, that they got upon a rocky ledge bordering the channel to save themselves from being carried into that dangerous vortex.

Beyond the ledge the wall was smooth.

There seemed no way to reach the opening except by allowing themselves to be drawn, probably to their death, through it by the water current.

Suddenly Ben pointed to a hole in the rock partly concealed by a rugged, protruding platform.

"We must see where that leads to," said Louis.

He crawled through the hole, followed by his companion.

To their surprise, the boys now found themselves in a cave containing rude furniture—a table, a couple of old chairs and some piles of matting, which latter had probably been used to serve the purpose of a couch.

A ladder, at one side of the cave, led up, apparently, through an opening to a wall above.

Louis ran up the ladder and soon found himself among the vines against the inside wall of the vault.

Looking through the vines, he beheld the vault which he and his friend had lately quitted.

"That explains how the being you saw was enabled to steal into the vault and vanish from it," he said, after he had drawn back and Ben had also taken a look.

"Who could he have been, and where can he be now?" said Ben.

"That is hard to tell. I am afraid he has made off with the raft."

There was a narrow passage leading from the cave.

Moving along this, the two boys reached an opening in the back part of the rock.

This overlooked the foaming vortex at its base.

Beyond, where the bay opened from the sea, the water was smoother.

"The raft is either sunken or has been taken off," cried Ben, despairingly. "I had hoped we would see some sign of it."

"Halloo! There is a ledge of rock almost reaching to the surface

of the sea and leading to the opposite shore," said Louis, peering down into the water. "By that means we can walk along to where the water is smoother, and swim to the opposite shore bordered by the cliffs."

"Ay, in that way we can escape from this place," said Ben, "but the raft—the treasure raft?" he added, hopelessly. "What has it to do with that?"

"Don't you see?" said Louis. "Once half way up the cliff we will have an extensive view, and may see the fellow who is making off with the raft."

"Little chance of that I am afraid," said Ben. "He may have tried to get off with the raft, but it is likely it went to pieces and that he went down with it in that white water with its eddies and furious tides!"

"We cannot be sure of that. He might have contrived to pull through. Take a bright view of the affair, Ben. He may, when on the cliff, see the raft and also the brig. We can signal the latter, and reaching her pursue the treasure thief whoever he may be."

Thus encouraged Ben quickly followed his friend along the ledge.

Reaching the end of it the boys took to the water and swam to the opposite shore.

Then putting on their shoes, which with their jackets they had tied to their backs, they ascended the cliff till they had reached a part which gave them a view of the ocean.

In the distance the water was bounded by a fog, but as far as they could see there was no sign either of the raft or of the brig.

Suddenly low voices fell upon their ears.

These voices seemed to come from some point above them.

Cautiously they moved in the direction of the sound.

Thus they reached the edge of a projecting platform of rock, covered with thick masses of drooping vines.

Peering through these vines they beheld two of the beachmen carelessly reclining with their faces toward the sea.

Nothing could have been more repulsive than the brutal expression of these men's faces.

They wore thick beards, which, however, did not conceal the evil look of their brown, reddish visages and keen, twinkling eyes.

Heavy boots rose above their knees, and in the belts about their waists were long pistols.

Unseen, the boys listened to them with much interest, as they talked in rough voices, their language interlarded with the oaths natural to the beachmen—the most villainous of all the driftings of the craft that ply along the coasts from California to San Carlos, Chili.

Banding themselves together, many of these men, after deserting their vessels, lead lawless, criminal lives, plundering their victims and killing them whenever opportunity offers.

Here on this part of the coast some of these rascals had collected to the number of a hundred, and, having attacked and plundered a coast schooner, they had, after killing the crew of ten men, taken possession of the craft, which they now used for waylaying any richly-laden vessel which should venture near the coast.

The two upon whom the boys now gazed had evidently come to this spot after the young sailors had climbed the cliff, and, therefore, had not yet seen them, owing to the rocky platform's projecting so far from the wall of the elevation.

"It was a useless brush we had with those men of the brig the other day, in that boat among the rocks," said one.

"Yes," answered the other. "The accursed rocks hindered our pistol shots from hitting even one of them. But for the storm coming up when it did, we'd have made short work of them by pulling out to them in our boat."

"Ay, but as it was, they got the best of us. They killed Tom Riggs, who had climbed up into the yew tree to get a shot at them."

"It was the accursed Kanaka in the boat who did that. The fellow was a little too handy with that spear he threw. Then came the gale and blew over the tree. Where it went to is a mystery."

"It don't make much difference, seeing as Tom was killed. I suppose it was drawn down by the current into that hollow under the rock."

"Most likely. Well, the fellows got off aboard their brig, I suppose, though we could not see in the storm-rack. The weather was very thick at the time."

"That it was. Their boat may have been swamped, and the brig may have gone down, too, for all we know. We have not seen her since."

"It don't matter much."

"I think it does. Five or six thousand dollars are not to be sneezed at. I doubt not the brig has that amount aboard, as she is evidently on the return home, after disposing of a cargo."

"One thing I don't understand. The boat we watched from here came ashore with two young fellows—boys—one of them in a naval uniform. He must have been the fellow that peppered us so badly with the guns aboard that brig. Now, then, I'm certain those boys were not in the boat when it was pulled back for the brig, after our attack upon it. What became of the boys I should like to know?"

"How you harp on that subject! Of course, the boys were somewhere in hiding among the rocks and they must have made tracks after the boat left them to some settlement on the coast above."

"We are not sure of that, but no use of my saying anything, our captain will not listen to me."

"Of course not. What does he care about the boys? If he saw them, they would have to die; but, except for revenge, there's no motive for bothering about them. Captain Brazos has his hands full

now repairing the damages made by that young naval devil with the brig's guns."

"He'll do us further damage yet if he's not hunted down, in my opinion."

"Nonsense, we'll not give him the chance. There are no war vessels on the coast."

Just then the boys heard a sort of unearthly squeal close to them. From a deep chasm in the cliffs sprang a large monkey, which had climbed up by a hanging vine, scampering off as fast as possible.

The two beachmen sprang to their feet somewhat startled, and bounding in the direction of the noise, beheld Louis and his friend ere they had a chance to conceal themselves.

"Ho! ho!" shouted both, and in an instant they covered the boys with their pistols.

Each of the young seamen had a pistol, and Ben had the hatchet. The contents of the small-arms having been soaked by their immersion in the water, these weapons could not be fired.

"Don't shoot, Bill!" cried one of the ruffians to the other. "Better take these fellows to our captain. He'll decide what's to be done with them. They may be used yet as a lure to bring back the brig to the coast."

"You'll make no cat's-paws of us, you villains!" said Louis.

"Well, come, march! We'll take you to our captain."

"I suppose we cannot help ourselves," said Louis, "but not a step will we budge until you lower your pistols."

"All right, we'll drop the muzzles, but on the least attempt of you two to escape, you are dead dogs. Bear that in mind, you young lubbers!"

"Throw your hatchet fair and square at the head of the man who just spoke," quickly whispered Louis to his friend. "I'll hurl my pistol at the other."

"Come there, no plotting!" cried the man who had previously spoken. "March on, I say!"

As quick as lightning Ben, pulling the hatchet from his belt, hurled it at the speaker.

The blunt edge of the instrument struck him. He reeled, half stunned, to the edge of the projecting platform of rock and over it headlong he fell.

As his form descended one long, wild, despairing cry escaped him ere he was dashed to death on the rocks far below.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNEXPECTED SIGHT.

THE moment the hatchet left Ben's hand the stricken man's companion had leveled and pulled the trigger of his pistol.

But as he did so Louis' pistol, swiftly hurled, struck him on the forehead, staggering him and so disturbing his aim that the bullet passed over Ben's head.

Both boys sprang toward him, but recovering himself he leaped from the edge of the platform at the side upon a projecting ledge of rock below him.

This ledge was so thickly covered with brush that the boys could not now see the man.

But as Ben repossessed himself of his hatchet and Louis of his pistol, another shot was fired by the ruffian.

It narrowly missed Ben's chin.

Had it struck him it would have passed up through his face and head, coming out at the top of his skull.

After the second shot the fellow was seen rapidly descending the cliff.

Arrived at its base, he shook his fist at the boys, and then running along the beach he disappeared around an angle of the cliff.

A minute later he was seen returning with a dozen others, who evidently had heard the fallen man's cry and discharge of the pistol.

These men commenced to ascend the cliff in pursuit of the boys.

The latter keeping as much screened as possible by the rocks, mounted to the summit of the cliff, which was thickly skirted with shrubbery, and moved on to seek some good hiding-place.

All at once they paused.

Below them in a curved bay, the high rocks of which at the corners would screen it from the view of any one out at sea, lay the schooner which Louis had so unmercifully battered.

As she was a light craft, the beachmen had, by means of heavy tackles raised her bow, which they were repairing with some of the hard wood of this coast.

The noise made by the blows of their hammers was drowned by the roar of a falling cataract on one side of the bay.

"We can go no further," said Ben, "without being seen by those workmen."

"No."

As he spoke Louis looked about him.

Near the two there was a cleft or chasm in the rock.

It was narrow and dark, with long vines drooping down into it.

"We will go down there," said Louis; "there is no alternative. Hark! the ruffians are close upon us though we cannot see them on account of the thick shrubbery."

"Down we go, then," said Ben, "but I am afraid they will suspect we are in the chasm."

Each seizing one of the vines, descended hand over hand.

They had gone some distance ere they alighted upon a projecting platform.

At the same moment they heard the voices of their pursuers above them.

As Ben had thought would be the case, they seemed to guess that the boys were in the chasm.

"Out of there, you young devils, or it will be the worse for you!" shouted one.

The two friends made no reply.

Then there was a flash of fire, accompanied by a pistol volley, and showers of bullets struck the platform on which the fugitives stood.

Feeling about with his hands, Ben discovered a hole in the side of the chasm.

The two had soon crawled into it, and as they did so another volley was fired down the chasm.

The jar of the report caused some loose rocks to become detached and fall over the mouth of the hollow in which the boys now crouched.

Again the men shouted to them.

"Come along!" cried the one who had previously spoken.

At this there was a hoarse laugh from the others.

"There's no doubt, I think, that we've already settled them!" cried a big ruffian. "How do you think they are going to answer, with dozens of bullets in their cursed skins? They're at the bottom of the chasm, stone dead, by this time, I take it."

"Bring a lantern, that we can make sure," said another of the gang.

A lighted lantern was finally brought up from the schooner below, together with a long rope.

The latter having been tied to the lantern, it was lowered into the chasm.

Far down was it dropped, lighting the sides of the deep cleft. There was a deep pool at the bottom of it, and no sign of the boys being seen, it was thought that they had been shot, and had fallen into this.

"Good-bye to the young hounds!" cried the man who had first spoken. "We are avenged on them, at any rate, for battering the schooner and killing several of our boys."

"We are not sure they are killed," said one of his companions. "I propose that a watch be kept here by the opening. Those fellows may have managed to crawl into some hollow in the side of the chasm, and may have escaped our bullets. If so, they will try to come out, sooner or later."

This proposal was approved of.

Three men were left by the mouth of the chasm, while the others descended to the bay, in which was the schooner, taking with them the rope and the lantern.

In the hollow, which was many fathoms below the opening of the ravine, the boys had not been able to hear what the men said.

They remained a long time in their lurking-place ere they ventured forth.

The pieces of rock over the hollow had been easy to remove, and now, on the platform, they looked up.

In the gloom, their forms could not be seen, but they could easily perceive those of the men on watch.

These men remained at their post for many hours.

At last, however, they went away. Then each of the boys seizing a vine commenced to clamber up toward the mouth of the chasm.

"They think they have shot us," said Louis. "We are safe enough now from them if we can keep out of their sight."

"They will see us from the bay if we climb out of the ravine," said Ben.

"True; we will have to wait until dark," said Louis, "before we venture forth."

On a ledge of the chasm, near the top, they therefore remained for many long, wearisome hours.

At last the shadows of evening closed, and then they ventured from the opening.

"Which way now?" inquired Ben. "In spite of the peril we are in, from our being near the beachmen, I am in favor of staying somewhere in this locality. I cannot give up the hope of our yet seeing the treasure raft."

Louis shook his head.

"I have little hope of our seeing that. I am afraid it has been sunk. Had it not been we would have got sight of it before now. Still I, too, am in favor of our staying about here awhile longer. Even if we do not see your raft, the brig ought to heave in sight before long. The crew, knowing we are ashore, would not willingly abandon us."

"How know we that the brig did not go down in the tempest of which the two beachmen spoke. It appears she has not been sighted since the storm."

"Well, we will watch for her, at any rate. We will go to that part of the cliff where we were in the first place and there pass the night. It is going to be a clear moonlight night. Fortunately there was food enough in the cave, across the bay, to last us for several days. The mysterious person who occupied it will not be likely to return to it if he has made off with the gold raft."

"That is true. The whole thing is a mystery. It does not look as if the man, whoever he was, would have tried to get off with the raft had he not been pretty sure of succeeding, and yet I don't see how he could have got it across those rough waters."

The boys went back to the part of the cliff, or near it, where they had first kept watch.

Presently up came the moon, and now the waters of the bay and wild scenery about them were lighted by its rays.

Suddenly Ben clutched the arm of his friend and pointed toward a part of the bay upon which lay the shadow of a rock.

"What is it? I see nothing," said Louis.

"There—there, just on the other side of that curve of the rock," said Ben.

"Ay, ay! I see it now! It is the raft—the treasure raft!"

"Yes, and there is some one on it, paddling it along. You can see his head and back. He is seated in front of one of the jars of emeralds!"

"It must be that strange being who visited us so mysteriously while we were in the vault."

"Of course. Who else could it be? Louis, we must get to that raft! That man must not be allowed to steal it!"

"He is paddling toward the sea. How fast he goes!"

"Yes; there must be a strong current to help him. Quick, Louis! We will swim out to the raft and take possession of it."

"But where can the fellow be bound to? Halloa!" and he pointed seaward. "There is a sail!"

Sure enough, in the distance, a white, column-like object was seen looming up in the moonlight.

"If I'm not mistaken, it is the brig!" continued Louis. "Come, we will get to that raft as soon as we can and make for the vessel."

The friends descended the cliff, and hurried along the beach until they were opposite the raft, which was now so far off that it was rendered indistinct.

Like a black shadow did it glide over the water, while the flash of the paddle plied by its occupant was now and then seen in the moonlight.

The boys took off their hats, jackets and shoes, and slung them to their backs.

Then they plunged into the water, and, aided by a current there, swam swiftly toward the precious raft.

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING APPARITION.

So swift and powerful were the strokes of the two swimmers that they gained upon the raft.

Within about five fathoms, or about thirty feet of it they were, when all at once the occupant turned his head.

As the clear moonlight fell upon that face, visible above the edge of the jar of emeralds, both boys uttered a cry of astonishment, blended with superstitious terror.

The face they saw seemed to them to bear a striking resemblance to that of Captain Truebolt—Ben's father!

For only a few seconds was it revealed to them.

Then it was turned away, and, with a wild sort of exclamation, the man continued to ply his paddle, now faster and harder than before.

The raft had been so fashioned by Louis that it was a little smaller at one end than at the other.

This had been done to increase its speed, as nothing slower on the water can be imagined than a raft which is square at both ends.

The additional vigor now displayed by the occupant sent the float along so rapidly that it began to increase the distance between it and the boys.

"It is leaving us!" gasped Ben. "Oh, Louis! you saw the man's face as well as I! Was it not like my dead father's?"

"Ay, it was," answered Louis. "Never in my life was I more startled by a man's resemblance!"

"Louis, it cannot be possible that it is my father!"

"No, no, how could it be?"

"True, even if by any possibility father was not dead while in the coffin he must have been drowned afterwards as we found it empty!"

"Yes. Think no more about it, Ben. Of course it was only a resemblance. But we do not seem likely to overtake the raft! See how far we are from the shore, too."

As he spoke both the young seamen looked behind them.

The shore was now at least two miles off. At the same time as they gazed at it an exclamation broke from them.

Emerging from the further bay they both beheld the schooner of the beachmen.

The craft had evidently been fully repaired, and was making for the sea under her fore and aft sails, with her main gaff-topsail also set.

There was a light breeze, but under her broad canvas the vessel made swift progress.

Several dark forms were upon her knighthead forward, and one of them held a night-glass to his eyes.

"They see the raft. With that glass they must even catch the gleam of the gems and emeralds in the jars and of the gold ornaments," said Louis. "They will secure that precious raft!"

"Fortune, indeed, seems against us!" cried Ben, despairingly. "There is every chance of our being shot by those fellows, for they must have seen us, too."

"There is some hope!" said Louis, pointing far ahead at the sail they had seen in that direction, and which now was rapidly approaching, having the wind in its favor.

"Ay, if it only comes up in time! As well as I can see, in the dim light, it looks like our brig."

"It is the brig!" answered Louis, positively.

Meanwhile, the schooner, though on the wind, came up rapidly.

Finally it reached a position on the larboard tack, about one hundred fathoms from the boys, and a little further, of course, from the raft.

Tacking, the vessel now drove straight toward the swimmers.

It seemed evident she would come up ere the brig could arrive in time to pick up the boys.

"We are lost!" said Ben.

"Never despair," said Louis; "see there!"

In fact, a cloud of mist was drifting rapidly along from windward. Already it hid the brig from sight.

A few moments later it closed over the raft and its occupant.

"Ay," said Louis, "fogs are common enough in this region. I only hope this one may not hinder our being picked up by the brig."

"How far off do you think the brig is?"

"About a mile, I should say."

"When she is a little nearer we might be heard if we shouted."

"Ay, but the other fellow would hear us, too. If we keep silent he may pass us in the fog."

"I'm pretty well used up. How is it with you, Louis?"

"My arms feel like lead. I cannot keep this up much longer."

A roaring noise soon after was heard near them, and they knew it was the beach schooner.

They saw her jib-boom looming through the mist, which was now all about them, as she came on.

"Dive!" said Louis, "and swim along under water. By the time we come up that craft will have passed us."

Both dove.

Even while under water they could hear the roar of the schooner as she swept past them.

Presently both, at the same moment, rose to the surface side by side.

They could just see the tip of the schooner's mainsail-boom, as she flew on into the fog, which, a few seconds later, hid her from the swimmers' gaze.

"That danger is past," said Louis. "The next tack will carry her ahead of us. And now if the brig would only come up."

At last, keeping in their present position by floating, at times turning over to resist the current with their strokes, they at last heard the brig within about sixty feet of them, though they could not see her.

"Brig ahoy!" shouted both with all their might.

"Ahoy! who calls? Where are you?" came the voice of the brig's second officer, an old seaman named Bill Loper.

"Here! here! Louis Harold and Ben Truebolt!" shouted the swimmers.

They kept up an incessant shouting that it might be known where they were, and presently they saw the brig's fly jib-boom pointed toward them, as she came on through the mist.

The mist, luminous with the moonlight, formed a silver haze.

As the boys waved their arms the dark outlines of these were evidently seen by the watchers aboard the Tremont.

On she came, and, in a few minutes, was passing them, when she was hove up into the wind, a boat was lowered and they were picked up.

"At last!" cried old Bill Loper. "This is a circumstance. We had heard you were lost before now, but I was bound to make a search for you."

He shook hands with them as he spoke.

"Why were you so long in getting back toward this part of the coast?" inquired Ben.

Then Loper gave an account of the brief affray with the beachmen after the boys had been lowered into the hollow.

"As we were leaving for the brig a storm came up," he continued.

"It was one of them sudden pealers we have off this coast. A tree blew over and came near hitting the boat. One of them cursed beachmen was up in the tree drawing a bead on us with his pistol just as the tree was tottering. Well, Mauna, the Kanaka, who, you know, never leaves the brig 'thout taking his spear with him, threw the weapon with good aim and pinned the fellow to a branch. Then it was awful to see the man struggling after the tree fell. He kicked and squirmed for a few seconds, then the tree was drawn down into that infernal hollow where you two had gone."

We made good speed for the brig, as the wind was blowing off shore.

By keeping her head to the sea, I saved her from swamping, and at last as the brig was hove to, we contrived to get aboard.

We found that the steering-gear had been damaged by the blow, and in spite of all we could do, we drifted further and further out to sea.

Several days passed before we could repair damages so as to head back toward this coast."

In a few words the boys now recounted their adventures to the wondering old sailors.

When they spoke of the resemblance the occupant of the raft bore to Ben's father, Bill raised his big, horny hands and made a backward motion with them, as he gasped out:

"Leave it alone, lads! Don't you meddle with that raft! There's Almighty providence in that 'ere consarn. It's your father's spirit, Ben, that's on that 'ere! A warning to you not to meddle with it."

"No, no, Loper, it was only a resemblance. The fellow is probably the same who came into the vault and left food for us."

"No, you don't," said old Bill, tapping his big blunt nose with his forefinger, "you can't make me think but you're on the wrong tack there, Ben. Is it probable a thief would have left food for you—a fellow that would steal a treasure-raft?"

"He might be some half-witted creature," said Ben.

"No, it was your father's ghost. Them ghosts will steal when it

suits their purposes, as under present circumstances. It's all done to keep you away from the raft."

The boys said no more at present on the subject.

Loper's ridiculous assertion made, of course, no impression on them.

The moment they were aboard the brig, Ben had her headed in the direction where he supposed the raft to be.

Then, leaving good lookouts, the friends went down into the cabin, where Mauna, the Kanaka steward, soon provided them with refreshments.

So excited were they about the raft that they thought not of sleep that night.

As soon as they had exchanged their wet and soiled garments for clean, dry ones, they went on deck.

"Something black ahead!" roared the lookout, as they went up from the cabin.

"It must be the raft," cried Ben, joyfully, and, followed by Louis, he ran forward.

Then the boys uttered a cry of disappointment.

The dark object proved to be a floating log.

"It is one of the logs of the raft," cried Louis, peering over at it.

"What can that mean?" gasped Ben.

"It looks as if the raft may, somehow, have gone to pieces," said Louis.

"Ay, the schooner, perhaps, has lately struck and stoven it," shouted Ben, in dismay.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHASE.

"If it's as you say," remarked Bill Loper, who was on the deck, "we had better keep on our home course."

"No, not yet—not until we have further proof of the raft's having been destroyed!" cried Ben.

The boys finally went below, leaving instructions with Loper to keep a good lookout and report to them any further discovery.

Knowing that sleep was necessary, each crept into his berth.

Nature at length overpowered them with drowsiness, and they fell into a deep slumber.

They awoke late the next morning.

After breakfast they hurried on deck.

The fog was clearing.

They looked earnestly about them.

As yet, nothing of interest met their gaze.

As the fog continued to lift before the beams of the rising sun, both the friends went aloft with glasses.

An hour had passed, and the last of the mist had just lifted on the western sea board, when Louis was noticed by Ben to keep his glass steadily pointed in one direction.

"Do you see anything, Louis?" he anxiously inquired.

"Ay, there it is—something that glitters—away off there on the water!" was the reply.

Ben turned his glass in the same direction.

"Can it be it is only the shine of a wave?" he said.

"No, you can see that it is too steady for that."

"It cannot be the raft. I see nothing black."

"Nor I, and yet it looks like the gleam of some of the gold that was on the raft!"

"It cannot be that, of course, without the raft."

"The water looks very white about it, whatever it is," said Louis.

"We must solve the mystery as soon as we can," cried Ben.

He shouted out his orders from aloft for the men to set the fore and main-royals, and for the craft to be headed due west, in which direction was the mysterious, glittering point resembling the gleam of gold.

The brig made swift progress, but as she kept on the sun rose higher until the glittering object which had been seen was so blended with its liquid gleam on the water, that it was no longer visible.

Presently it was discovered that the whiteness on the water which had been noted, was caused by a school of bonitas, or ship-jacks—a fish found in great numbers in this part of the ocean.

And where now was the shining object which had been seen?

It was nowhere visible, though the expanse of waters was carefully scanned.

Further west there was collected a thickening haze, which hid the surface.

Suddenly, off the brig's weather quarter, was seen a craft which had just hove in sight, and was apparently on the same course as the brig.

"It is the beach craft!" cried Ben, pointing his glass toward it.

"Ay, depend upon it, she, too, caught sight of the shining object, and, in my opinion, her purpose is the same as ours—she is after the gold raft."

"Would to Heaven I knew whether that raft still existed, or whether it was broken and its contents sunk!" cried Ben. "This suspense and anxiety sets my blood on fire!"

Then it was that Louis gave his friend some good advice.

"It is occasions of this sort that try the temper of a man's soul, Ben. Remember that and keep cool, steady and watchful. That is the way to succeed."

"Ay, you are right, Louis. I must control myself, or I will work my blood into a fever."

"That's so, Ben," remarked old Loper, who stood nearer. "What a pity you don't chew 'bacca—there's philosophy in the weed—it quiets the narves!"

And he gave emphasis to the assertion by discharging his old quid

with a dexterous effort to leeward, and replacing it with a bite from a fresh plug.

It is singular what important results sometimes follow the most insignificant actions.

Unconsciously watching the old quid, as it fell into the sea, Ben uttered a sudden exclamation and ran close to the lee rail.

"What is it?" cried Louis.

"There! see there!" cried Ben.

Fast to a chip, which was floating on the water, was a large glittering diamond—a gem of rare brilliancy.

The long roll of the sea lifted it on its crest, so that it could be plainly seen.

"Back the head-yards!" shouted Ben, "and down with a boat!"

The order was promptly obeyed.

With Ben and Louis in it, the boat was rowed to the chip, which was then picked up by Ben.

The gem proved to be a diamond of value.

A cut had been made in the chip, and the diamond had been stuck into it so as to keep its place.

The surface of the chip had been smoothed, and on it, traced in large letters, evidently with a blunt lead pencil, were these words:

"What object is wealth when it but leads to the grave? Follow not the dead!"

The boys on reading this looked at each other in astonishment.

"This, of course, was written by the person on the raft," said Ben.

"It looks as if he must be my father."

"It is strange enough," responded Louis, with a shudder. "It would almost seem as if Loper was right about the raft being occupied by your father's spirit."

"No, no, we will not, of course, believe anything of that kind. We have not lost our senses."

"What can be the meaning of it? Do you think the fellow on the raft is the one who visited us so mysteriously in the vault?"

"Yes, I think so, and he but wrote this to deter us from a further search for the gold raft."

"But we both saw the man's face last night when it was turned toward us from the raft, and it was certainly like that of your father."

"Ay, there's the mystery of the thing. But father's face, after all, was an ordinary one. There may be many persons resembling him. In the dim light we might have seen a look in that face like his, when in broad daylight it would have seemed entirely different."

"True enough, your idea must be the right one. We are now pretty sure, at any rate, that the raft still holds together. That writing must have been made by the light of day. It could not have been so steadily traced in a dim light. What do you think of the hand?"

"Ay, that's what puzzles me somewhat. It is like father's, but, as it was done with a blunt pencil, it looks a little different from his, as he usually wrote with a fine-pointed one. But as he wrote a running sort of hand, it was like that of many other people."

When the boat was rowed back to the brig and Loper heard of the discovery just made, he seemed positive that the occupant of the raft was Captain Truebolt's ghost.

It may appear strange that any one could for an instant entertain a notion of this kind, but there are many old sailors fully as superstitious as Loper to be still found aboard ship.

The brig was kept upon her course. The haze ahead thickened, but the vessel had not made much more than a league, when, from the lookout aloft, came the startling cry:

"Something far ahead! Looks like a raft!"

Ben and Louis were aloft in a few moments, each provided with a spy-glass.

There it was, sure enough, the very raft they were looking for, with the treasures and the man still upon it.

It was dimmed by the haze, but it could be made out quite distinctly for all that.

"Now then," said Louis, "how the raft could have got so far from the coast in so short a time is certainly a mystery! Loper would say it is because the person who manages it is a ghost!"

"It is a strange affair altogether," said Ben, "but I am now in hopes we will soon overtake the raft, and then the mystery will be explained, in some way or other."

"I am not so sure of our overtaking the raft. See how it flies through the water! What, in the name of wonder, can cause it to move so swiftly?"

All aboard the brig were equally surprised.

Old Loper shook his head again and again, as he frequently muttered:

"No 'arthly raft that, and no good will come of our chasing it!"

Though the brig now was under all her canvas, she did not gain on the raft.

Just so near it she would get, but no nearer.

At one time it seemed as if it would be carried out of sight altogether, in the thick mist which lay on the waters ahead.

Meanwhile, it could be seen that the beach schooner had also sighted the raft and was after it.

The drift brought the two vessels gradually nearer each other.

Then there was a puff of smoke from the schooner, and a shot came howling along between the brig's fore and main masts.

Ere now Louis had, with Ben's permission, had the brig fitted into a sort of little war craft.

Openings to serve as port-holes had been made by the carpenter in the vessel's bulwarks for the four carronades, which had, as stated, previously been brought up from the hold.

The brig now had two guns, twelve-pounders, on each side, as well as the one forward.

On came the schooner, and, as she drew nearer, her fierce men could be seen, armed to the teeth, and evidently prepared for boarding.

With only a dozen men aboard the brig, the boys comprehended that, if possible, they must prevent this.

Again and again did Louis sight the guns and fire.

But the heavy swell prevented his doing little more than damaging the schooner's fly-jib boom.

On she came, now and then firing a shot, which, however, did not strike the brig.

"If you take my advice," said Loper to Ben, "you'll sheer off away from that fellow. He has nearly a hundred men aboard, and, as you know, we have but twelve."

"And leave him to get possession of the treasure raft?" said Ben. "No, I will be blown to pieces first!"

"Ay, ay!" echoed Louis. "We may be able to hinder his boarding us. I am waiting for a chance to rake him."

The schooner now was not more than fifty fathoms off.

Louis watched her keenly.

In a few moments more she was so close that it seemed as if a few seas would send her near enough for her men to board.

There they were, waving pistols and cutlasses and uttering fierce shouts.

Their captain, a tall ruffian, wearing a red shirt, sprang upon the after-rail, and holding on to the main rigging with one hand, waved his sword about his head with the other.

"Away with you or we will cut you to pieces! That treasure raft shall be ours! Head off to the southward and we'll not trouble you!"

"Thank you!" shouted Ben, sarcastically, in answer.

Then, as the brig rose on a sea, Louis gave the order to fire, and the shot from the two guns swept the deck of the schooner fore and aft.

The nearness of the latter vessel had afforded the youth the desired chance to rake her.

The guns, loaded with shot and scraps of old iron, sent their contents directly through the ranks of the outlaws, creating dreadful havoc among them.

CHAPTER IX.

A SINGULAR DISCOVERY.

SHRIEKS, groans and curses rose from the stricken crew of the schooner.

"Steady there at the wheel!" roared their captain, "and we will be aboard of the brig in a few moments!"

Such, in fact, would have been the case had not the brig's helmsman, in obedience to a signal from Louis, suddenly put up his helm.

As a consequence the Tremont fell off, and the schooner passed her stern—her jib-boom alive with the forms of the baffled beach men, who had been in the act of boarding.

Then, having ordered his yards braced for the purpose, Louis lulled up and delivered another raking fire from his starboard guns.

This was as effective as the other broadside.

More than half the crew were now killed and disabled.

The schooner's main-boom was also shot away, and the sail was flapping wildly about in the wind.

"Curse that navy fellow!" cried the captain, "he has outmaneuvered us! The fools at the chasm ashore should have kept better watch. Then those boys would not have escaped to do us mischief."

The brig was now kept on her course after the raft.

But Louis did not leave the schooner without giving her some parting shots, which so damaged her rigging that hours must elapse ere she would be able to make repairs so as to keep on her way.

But for a sudden squall which came up, Louis would not, in fact, have left the beach craft until he had tried to sink her.

The coming storm, however, rendered it necessary to take in sail and head the vessel before it.

The canvas was not stowed a moment too soon.

The storm struck the sea with a prolonged roar and shriek, and the craft was sent flying swiftly before the gale.

So thick now was the weather that neither the raft nor the schooner could be longer seen.

"That raft may go to pieces in such a gale," said Ben, much disengaged.

"No. You can see that the gale is violent enough to beat the sea down flat," replied Louis. "Beside, the raft is a strong one. True, we saw one of the logs from it adrift, but, in my opinion, it was purposely cut clear of the raft to make it narrower and so increase its speed."

The storm lasted for an hour. When it had passed the weather was still thick.

No sign of the raft was to be seen.

For days was it vainly searched for.

Most of the time there was, however, a thick mist.

Not once, as yet, had it entirely cleared.

It was the usual season for fogs in this part of the ocean.

"We are now far to the westward," Ben remarked, one morning. "There is little chance, I am afraid, of our seeing the raft again."

As he spoke, the fog lifted somewhat ahead.

"Land O!" cried all who were on deck.

"What land is it?" inquired Louis.

"I cannot tell," answered Ben, "as the thick weather has for days hindered our taking an observation."

The land had the appearance of a lofty, solitary island.

From a conical peak, on a mountain whose rugged wall rose directly from the sea, there issued flame and smoke.

As the brig drew still nearer the island, the roar of the volcano could be heard.

"Halloo!" suddenly cried Ben, "as true as I am alive there it is!"

Looking at the base of the volcanic mountain the spectators saw a dark object.

"You think it is the raft?" said Louis. "It may be, but it hardly looks like it to me!"

"What else can it be?" said Ben. "It is something dark, there on the water, close to the base of the mountain!"

Both boys pointed their glasses toward the object.

Then they noticed something of a cylindrical shape projecting from it, half turned over on its side.

As the brig drew still closer to the island, they uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The object they saw was not the raft.

It was the wreck of a small steamer, and the cylinder-like projection they saw was its pipe, half hidden by the water.

Ben, as the vessel kept on, had a man over in the chains, sounding with the lead.

This soon showed him that the depth kept decreasing.

To keep from shoaling he ordered his halyards let go and dropped anchor in the bay.

"Down with the quarter-boat!" he then cried.

The boat was lowered, manned by four men, and off it went, with Louis and his friend in it.

It soon reached the wreck of the steamer.

The boys boarded the latter.

It lay nearly over on its beam-ends, half submerged.

Evidently it had sunk from a hole having been made in its bottom timbers by a rock against which it had struck.

It was not more than twenty-five feet in length.

In fact, it bore some resemblance to the tugs which are seen on the New York rivers, except that it had a mast and a broad, square sail, the latter to propel it on its course in case its fuel should be exhausted.

Its overturned side was wedged in a cleft between two rocks.

As the boys moved about the part above the surface, both suddenly uttered a simultaneous cry of horror and surprise.

A dead man, caught in the turns of a rope which held him fast to the part of the steamer under the water, met their gaze.

His face, which was twisted round so that his staring, glazed eyes were turned upward, was certainly not that of any inhabitant of this island, if, indeed, the island was inhabited at all.

It was the face, apparently, of a half-breed Mexican Indian, and the dress corresponded with that of one of this race.

The leather trousers, the braided shirt, with its broad collar, the belt containing a long knife and the large-rimmed hat, so tightly jammed down over the forehead that it still remained in its place, were plainly visible.

But that which most riveted the attention of the two friends was a small bag of gold dust, still tightly clutched by the right hand, which thus, even in death, had maintained its hold of the treasure.

"Great Heaven!" cried Ben. "That bag of gold dust is one of those which was on the raft!"

"Ay, there can be no mistake about that," responded Louis.

"What can it mean?"

"God only knows. Surely this is not the person whom we saw on the raft."

"No, it is plain he belonged to this steamer. It is one of the little coast craft that I have seen plying between San Francisco and Panama. But how, in the name of wonder, came the vessel away off here, thousands of miles from the Mexican coast?"

This question could not be answered by either.

"One thing seems certain," said Ben. "The steamer must have fallen in with the raft, or the man could not have that bag of gold dust."

"That seems certain, and it must have happened lately, too, which would prove that the raft even at this present moment is somewhere in the vicinity of this island."

"Ay, ay! Thank God! we are on the right track of that raft after all."

"Yes; the man must have but lately obtained the gold, and but lately have perished," continued Louis; "otherwise a shark would have had his body ere now."

"True! Well, that gold dust is very valuable, and as it is my property, I am going to have it!" said Ben.

So saying, he took off his hat, jacket and shoes, and a moment later he was slipping down through the water toward the dead body.

Seizing the bag of gold dust, he strove to pull it from the dead man's clutch.

Then, to his horror and surprise, this dead form suddenly seemed to throw itself over toward him.

Directly upon him did it fall with a dull thud, and he could feel the cold face pressed to his.

As he struggled to free himself, he felt the corpse going down from the vessel into the depths, apparently dragging him with it.

Lower and lower did it draw him, until he felt himself slipping along the outside of one of the slimy, under-water rocks, in the cleft of which the steamer was caught.

But now, while nearly overcome both with horror at the fact of his being thus dragged under as well as by suffocation, he felt the body leave him with a quick jerk, and at the same instant he caught sight

of a pair of lurid, evil eyes beyond the left shoulder of the dead man, and a huge fin and tail furiously thrashing the water.

He now understood what had happened.

An enormous shark had hurled itself upon the lifeless form under it, and thus had caused it to fall violently over upon the swimmer.

Then the dead man's dagger-hilt had caught in Ben's belt, and in this way, as the dead body was drawn down by the shark, he had been carried with it.

But the knife had now slipped from its sheath, and this had freed the boy from the awful incumbrance.

The latter with the bag of gold dust was drawn further down into the depths, while Ben rose toward the surface.

He had not reached it, when, seizing his arms, Louis jerked him up still more quickly.

As it was he was nearly breathless when he crawled to the side of his friend.

CHAPTER X.

A DREADFUL LOSS.

"THANK fortune you are safe!" cried Louis. "You went down so quickly that nothing could have been done to help you. It was the strangest sight I ever saw."

"The big shark suddenly appeared under the dead man, biting through the ropes about him and seizing him in its jaws by the back of the neck. Then down he went, and to my surprise you went with him!"

"Ay, the cross-handle of his dagger caught in my belt and that's what drew me down. I am safe now, but the bag of gold dust is lost!"

"Yes, we will never see that again."

"But I hope, Louis, that we will soon see the raft. It must be somewhere near the island. That man who has just sunk must, when living, have boarded the raft and taken the gold dust from it."

"I should have thought the one who was on the raft would have tried to hinder him," said Louis.

"Probably he did and got the worst of it. If so, where, then, is the raft? Why did not the half-breed secure it?" cried Louis.

"That is a puzzling question. In fact, this whole affair is a mystery."

"Ay, the strangest mystery I ever had to deal with."

As Louis spoke, he looked off to windward.

"Helloa!" he suddenly cried. "I thought so, when we left the brig."

"What?"

"That a gale would soon be upon us. See!"

He pointed toward black, rolling masses of rack, which were scudding over the sea toward the island, and beneath which the water was lashed to foam.

"Back to the brig, men, and tell Loper to drop another anchor!" cried Ben, addressing the crew of the boat.

"Do you think it will hold?" inquired Louis.

"Ay, the gale is not going to be a violent one and not of long duration."

The boat's crew seized their oars and pulled swiftly toward the brig.

"Now," said Louis, "the sooner we get off this wreck the better. She will not hold together when the gale strikes her."

There was a small dingey attached to the after part of the steamer.

This boat had lifted from the cranes when the craft went over, and it now floated, still held by the tackle.

The boys cut away the tackle, and, getting into the dingey, pulled it to a narrow strip of beach near a part of the base of the volcanic mountain.

"The seas will have a good sweep over us when they come, if we stay here," remarked Louis.

Ben glanced up at the wall of the mountain, but perceived that it was too steep to climb.

Looking along its base, the two saw an opening in the steep rock, facing the water.

"There is a cave. We will enter that," said Louis.

They had soon directed the dingey to the opening.

On one side they saw rugged ledges, which would enable them to climb nearly to the roof of this cave, which was about twelve feet high.

At present they remained watching the brig.

The boat's crew soon boarded her, and, not long after, the boys could hear the splash of the other anchor as it was dropped, and could see the men furling the sails.

And now a cry of dismay escaped both boys.

Coming swiftly along, from a cloud of flying mist which had hitherto concealed her, was the beach schooner.

She was not more than two miles off.

Her crew had taken in nearly all her canvas, but, driven by the gale, she was making swift progress.

Finally, as she was passing close to the anchored brig, she fired shots at her, which were returned by the Tremont, but, owing to her being to leeward, without effect.

Suddenly the brig keeled over, and the two watchers knew that some of the shots had struck her near the water-line, and that the water was pouring into her hold.

"Great Heaven!" cried Ben, aghast, "the brig is lost."

In fact, as the schooner went flying on past the brig, heading so as to escape going ashore, her fierce crew were seen waving their arms exultantly, while they rent the air with triumphant shouts.

And now, struck by the howling, roaring gale, the brig heeled still further over.

With a loud crash, away went her mainmast.

"Too bad! Too bad!" cried Louis.

Huge white seas were observed breaking and tumbling about the vessel.

No boat could be lowered in that rough weather, and the brig's men, slipping their cable, strove to save their lives by beaching the craft on a sandy shore, to the left of the volcanic mountain.

"That will not help them!" cried Ben.

"No," answered Louis. "I fear the craft will strike some sunken reef or rock ere she reaches the beach."

The boys, as the seas came rolling into the cavern, were obliged to climb toward the roof to save themselves from the masses of tumbling waters.

They fastened the dingey's warp to a spur of rock, and leaving it slack, the boat was thus kept saved from being dashed to pieces against the rugged wall.

The direction of the seas was straight toward the center of the cave, so that the dingey rocked and plunged without striking either wall. From their position they could still see the brig.

On she flew toward the beach, but when within ten fathoms of it, what the boys had expected took place.

With a terrific crash she struck a sunken rock.

Away went her other mast, her hull broken into three parts, and the next moment was engulfed in the roaring, tumbling waters, which dashed what remained of it to fragments against the rocks.

"Thank God! the crew will be saved!" cried Ben. "There they all are clinging to the foremast which last went over."

"Ay, ay," said Louis. "I see them! They are all there. I can count ten heads!"

"But, look! they are being caught by a current and carried out to sea instead of toward the beach. They will be borne past the promontory of the bay!" rejoined Ben.

"God have mercy on the poor fellows!" said Louis. "At any rate, this gale will not last long, and they will have a chance of being picked up by some passing vessel."

"I hope the beach schooner will not be the one to pick them up!" said Ben. "If she does, their fate is sealed."

"She has been driven off," said Louis. "We cannot now see her in the black rack. It is not likely she will sight them."

Anxiously did the boys watch the castaways.

They had obtained a firm hold of the mast, to which they all had evidently lashed themselves with ropes.

They were carried past the promontory of the bay, and ere long the driving rack-mist hid them from the watchers' gaze.

But the gale was not of long duration.

As it passed away the mist cleared, and the sun shone brightly upon the waters.

"Sail O!" cried Louis, pointing in the distance.

"It must be the beach schooner," said Ben.

Louis had brought a spy-glass with him.

He scanned the distant vessel carefully.

Then he gave a cry of joy:

"I see them! I see them! They are alongside of the vessel, and are all being taken aboard! She is a ship!"

"Thank God! they are all saved then!"

"Ay, all saved, but—but the craft steers rather wild!"

"Is she not coming this way?"

"No, she's heading in the opposite direction. Her steering-gear must have been damaged. We will not be picked up by that ship!"

Ben took the glass, and perceived that the ship, in fact, was heading away from the island, and she steered as if her rudder was damaged.

The boys long watched her, and at last she was hull down.

Finally she could no longer be seen.

Hitherto Ben's anxiety, on account of his crew, had diverted his mind from the extent of the misfortune which had befallen him in the destruction of his brig.

Now that his crew were safe, the thought of what he had lost broke upon his mind with overwhelming force.

Not only had he lost a fine brig, but also the money and valuables aboard of her, all amounting to about ten thousand dollars!

"Fool that I was!" he cried, while speaking of this great loss to Louis, "to think of cruising after that treasure raft! I should have taken Loper's advice! Old people know what they are talking about, but we, who are young, are ever either misunderstanding them or neglecting their counsel!"

"That is often so," said Louis, "but, in this instance, I think we were right in searching for the raft. Loper was influenced against it solely by foolish, superstitious fears."

Ben grasped his friend's hand.

"I wish I had your bright, hopeful disposition!" he cried. "You really think, then, that we will yet find that precious raft?"

"I do," finally answered Louis.

"God knows this is cheering to me!" said Ben.

"Ay, the finding of that raft, with all its treasure, will recuperate you many times over the amount of your loss!"

"But here we are," said Ben, "without food. How are we to continue our search for the raft?"

Louis pointed to the beach.

The breaking up of the little steamer had caused several boxes to be washed against the strip of beach, to which allusion has been made.

Their striking against the hard rock had broken them open, but they had become firmly wedged in crevices of the rock.

Through the gaps in the shattered wood cans of preserved meats and fruits were revealed.

"Ay!" cried Ben, joyfully, "there we have food enough to last us for days."

"Yes, and we will at once fall to, as our late hardship has given me an appetite."

The two friends descended into the dingey, and quickly worked it to the beach.

There, after having transferred some of the canned meats and fruits to the dingey, they made a meal.

A fortunate accident for them it was that the little steamer had gone to pieces so near the base of the mountain.

Otherwise the boxes would have been tumbled about and their contents lost among the under-water rocks.

Much refreshed by their meal, the two friends now sculled the dingey back into the cavern.

It seemed to be of great extent, though the roof appeared to slope and become lower the further it was from the opening.

The seas had, by now, subsided to a gentle swell.

"I have an idea that we should look in this cavern for that raft," said Louis, with gleaming eyes.

"Why?" inquired Ben.

"There is an answer to that question," said Louis, pointing to a crevice in the wall of the cave.

Sure enough, wedged in the crevice was something which seemed to indicate that the raft had passed that way.

This was the half of a paddle, which had caught in the fissure.

"In shoving the raft along with his paddle, the man on it must have caught the blade of the implement in that crack, causing it to break off," continued Louis.

"Ay, it must be so!" replied Ben, "though," he suddenly added, "it might have been left there by some native in a canoe."

"No. Depend upon it, this little island is uninhabited," answered Louis. "In my opinion, it is a perilous island, on account of the volcano. Hark!"

A loud rumbling proceeded from the interior of the cave.

The whole mountain, for a few moments, seemed to rock and sway like a ship.

"Be of good cheer!" cried Louis, as Ben looked discouraged.

As he spoke, the rumbling noise ceased, and the isle no longer shook.

At the same moment the boys heard a strange, unearthly sort of cry, coming apparently from the innermost recesses of the cave.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRE-MONSTER.

"WHAT was that?" said Ben. "It was like the voice of a human being."

"Not exactly," said Louis. "Oh! Great God! What does that mean?" he suddenly added.

A long streak of lurid light seemed to dart toward the two friends. On it came speeding toward them, wriggling and squirming, while screams and hisses issued from it.

Two great, luminous eyes and a long, flat head, with a flaming fin projecting just back of it, could be seen in front of this streak of fire.

"Helloa! 'tis a fire-serpent!" cried Ben.

The two directed the dingey to one side.

"I thought those creatures only existed in fable!" gasped Louis. "What can it mean?"

The serpent, still screaming and hissing, came straight toward them.

In a few seconds it was close to the dingey, and was about to twine itself about the boat, when, drawing a loaded pistol he had brought with him from the brig in his belt, Louis fired at the flaming monster's head.

The bullet struck the strange creature directly in the eye.

It reared itself until its head nearly touched the roof of the cave.

Then down it went plunging under the water and the boys could hear its hissing form scraping the bottom of the boat as it passed under it.

A cloud of steam rose about them.

As it passed away they saw the scorched and blackened body of the serpent, no longer ablaze, floating along the surface of the bay.

"I thought so!" cried Louis. "At least, when it came closer. The monster was covered with burning sulphur, which, owing to the late disturbance of the cave, must have fallen upon its body. This blazing sulphur must have been connected with the volcano."

"Ay, that explains what seemed marvelous at first," said Ben. "Had Loper been here, he would have insisted that the creature was a sort of serpent salamander."

"It was probably a hydrus stoker," said Louis, "or of that species. I have seen something of this occurrence off the coast of Java, though on a smaller scale. There was an eruption of a volcano, near which our frigate lay, and a whole nest of poisonous serpents on fire dropped down from one of the fissures of the mountain."

The two now continued on, Louis sculling the boat and Ben keeping a keen watch ahead.

As they proceeded far into the depths of the cavern it became darker.

"A pity we have not a lantern with us," remarked Louis.

"Ay, the gloom ahead is almost impenetrable," said Ben. Then he leaned far forward eagerly peering ahead.

"Do you see anything?" inquired Louis.

"I think so, ay, and I am now sure of it. I see a bright glitter through the darkness."

"A glitter?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, Louis! what I see are the gems and gold on the treasure raft!"

"Are you sure?"

"Ay, sure enough now. Good God!" he almost shrieked, "there is the outline of the man's head on the raft. I see the white of his ghastly face—I see the glare of his eyes! Quick! Louis, quick! for Heaven's sake, he is receding from us!"

"I see that glitter now," said Louis, as he redoubled his efforts at the oars. "We are close upon the precious raft, Ben. We will have it in a few moments."

Then from out the gloom came a deep, hollow, unearthly voice:

"Follow not the dead!"

The boys were startled.

As for Ben he shook from head to foot.

It might only have been imagination, but it seemed to him that the tones of the voice were like his father's—such, at least, as they might have been, were it permitted to the dead to speak.

"Quick, Louis, quick! he recedes from us fast! Oh, God! if we should not reach the raft after all."

"We will reach it!" cried Louis, in a determined voice.

Oh, how he worked at that oar!

The perspiration streamed down his face, and the dingey fairly seemed to fly through the water.

But that glitter ahead continued to recede and finally vanished.

A strange whirling, rushing noise was heard apparently ahead of it. Presently the boys could detect another and dimmer sort of gleam. It was like a moving band of soft, sparkling light.

"Helloa! What's that? Another mystery?" cried Louis.

"Heaven help us!" shouted Ben.

"What's the matter, Ben?"

"If I mistake not, it's a sort of whirlpool we see!" was the answer.

"Ay, ay, so it is!" gasped Louis. "I thought I could feel a strong current drawing us that way."

"We are lost, Louis—we are lost! We cannot escape that whirlpool!"

"No—no. See! it is not a whirlpool, after all—it is something worse!" cried Louis.

In fact, at that moment, there was a loud report, followed by a lurid burst of light!

The light distinctly revealed a ring of revolving waters.

This was caused by a cataract, which, coming from an opening in the rocky wall near them, blended with a hot, steaming rush of waters from an opposite fissure.

The two together caused an agitation which nothing drawn into it could have withstood.

The water rose bubbling and boiling, shooting out in curved jets like the arms of a living monster!

"The raft has been caught in that death-trap and has been torn to pieces!" cried Ben, pointing to several logs which had been ground almost to chips upon the sharp rocks in the midst of the agitated caldron of waters!

"Ay, ay, I am afraid so!" sadly answered Louis.

"But we have now to think of our lives!" continued Ben. "Those waters are boiling hot, and we are being fast drawn toward them!"

In fact they were now borne along with tremendous speed, while, from a passage to the left, they could still see the gleam of the strange light.

With alarm did the boys look upon the white foaming caldron of heated waters.

Fortunately, however, there were projections on the rocky wall, which they could seize and endeavor thus to save themselves from the dreadful fate that menaced them.

In this way they arrived opposite the passage which was so strangely lighted, when Louis, to prevent the dingey from being drawn into the steaming vortex, threw the end of the boat's looped warp about a spur beyond on the end of the opposite side of the passage, and pulled on it. Then the two beheld in an opening in the rugged wall of the latter an upward shooting mass of flames going round and round. A moment they gazed upon it and then kept on.

"Our seeing those logs proves that the raft is destroyed," cried Ben. "Too bad! too bad!"

He bowed his head on his breast and a groan escaped him.

"Cheer up," said Louis. "We are not sure after all that the raft was destroyed! Only the logs we saw may have broken from it."

"May fortune grant that you are right," said Ben. "Oh! if I could only get that raft—what a godsend it would be to me, after my losing the brig and all my money!"

"Bear in mind, I do not say positively I think you will!" cried Louis, alarmed lest he should falsely buoy up the hopes of his friend.

The two boys drew the dingey along past the boiling waters, keeping close to the rocky wall of the cavern.

On they went and presently they were out of reach of the perilous caldron.

They entered a broad basin where the water was comparatively calm, and kept on along a passage extending still further.

At last they reached the termination of the lengthy cave.

Their further progress was blocked by a solid wall of rock.

"All hope of our finding the raft is gone now!" cried Ben, in despair. "This proves that it must have been lost in that vortex behind us with all its precious treasures."

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAT.

As there now seemed hardly a doubt of his friend's disconsolate remark being true, Louis answered not a word.

"Well," said Ben, dashing a hand across his brow, "now that I know the worst, there is no use of repining."

Louis grasped his hand.

"Well said, Ben!" he cried. "But come what will, you may know that you always have a friend in me. I have influence with the captain of my frigate, and I will use it to obtain for you some good position aboard the ship."

"Ay, if we ever reach your ship," said Ben, with a grim smile, which Louis could detect by the faint gleam from the light behind the two. "Remember, we are here on this strange island, from which we may never escape."

"And why not?" inquired Louis. "We have a boat and provisions."

"Yes, but hark! burst upon burst of thunder from the mountain! In my opinion the whole or a part of it will soon explode and we be buried in flaming rocks and lava."

"The best thing we can do is to try and get out of this as soon as we can."

"One consolation is that we will not be puzzled by any more mysteries about that strange raft," said Ben, sadly. "Never again will we see it, going so swiftly along the sea as to elude a brig under full sail! What a singular, incomprehensible affair that was!"

"It certainly was," said Louis. "How in the name of wonder that singular occupant of the raft could go so much faster than we aboard the brig, on that clumsy float, baffles my comprehension!"

They now commenced to work the dingey along on the backward course toward the bay.

They exerted themselves with all their might, for the roaring, crackling noise to which Ben had alluded became every moment more frequent.

In fact, it may have been fancy, but it seemed to the boys that they could see the rugged roof tremble above their heads.

Suddenly Ben uttered a wild cry.

He shook in every limb.

"Oh, Louis! See—see!"

And he thrust his oar into a mass of curious black and green weeds that hung down from a part of the wall they were passing into the water.

"What is it?" said Louis.

"The weeds—the weeds!" replied Ben. "Look! I can thrust my oar straight through them! They hang over a wide passage here, which we have not yet explored!"

This was true.

On pushing aside some of the weeds, the boys beheld a dark passage extending beyond.

On account of the weeds they had not previously noticed that the passage was there.

Into it, through these yielding weeds, they forced their boat.

"If we only had a light!" cried Louis. "We cannot see half a ship's length through this darkness!"

Louis remembered that he had some matches in a safe in his pocket.

But whether he could light them or whether they were become too damp to be ignited he knew not.

He tried one.

It could not be lighted.

He had three more left.

One of these sputtered and went out immediately.

The third, however, with infinite pains, was made to burn.

Ben instantly picked up an open salmon can in the boat, and dipped a piece of ratline taken from his pocket into the oily mixture.

He lighted it by the match, and in this way a good torch was provided.

Ben held it up, while Louis continued to scull the boat. This branching passage was not a very long one.

As the light gleamed toward the further end of it, Ben uttered a cry.

"What now?" said Louis.

"Did you not see it?"

"I saw nothing except the water and the walls of the cave."

"Well, either my eyes deceived me, or as true as I am alive, I saw the end of a log."

"A log?"

"Yes, there, ahead. It was just disappearing in what I suspect is the opening of another cave in the wall."

"The end of a floating log? It must have been one of the logs of the raft."

"Of course. But the question is," cried Ben, in a fever of excitement, "whether that log was a detached one, or was a part of the raft itself, going into that opening?"

"We shall soon see!" cried Louis, as he redoubled his efforts at the oar.

On went the dingey, to finally reach an opening in the wall leading into a cave about twenty or thirty feet in size.

Huge masses of lava-like rock hung from the roof at each side, forming many hollows.

The boys looked about them, but they saw no sign either of the log or of the raft.

"It must have been mere fancy," said Louis, "that made you think you saw that log."

"No, no! I am sure I saw it!" cried Ben.

"Look!" said Louis, suddenly. "What does that mean?"

Jammed in one of the small hollows was a man's hat. It had a broad rim, and was just such a hat as the boys had seen on the head of the man who had occupied the raft.

"Ay," said Ben, with wild eyes, "how came that hat here jammed in this hollow as if some one put it there?"

Louis shrugged his shoulders with a puzzled air.

"It is strange enough," he said, reflectively.

Then his face lighted up.

"Ben," he said, solemnly, "I believe that the being we saw on the raft is at this moment near us!"

"You do—and the raft?"

"That I know nothing about, but as true as I live I think that strange man is behind this block of lava! Hold up the torch close to the hollow, Ben. A man might possibly squeeze into that narrow space!"

Eagerly did Ben hold up the torch while Louis peered into the hollow.

But he saw no one there.

He was about to turn away when he heard something drop into the water.

It was a piece of loosened rock which had fallen from above, as he could judge by the sound.

He looked up and imagined he saw a dark projecting shadow in the gloom there which was not reached by the light.

"Hold the torch, higher, Ben! Quick," cried Louis.

Ben did so, but Louis was now led to believe that the shadow he had seen was merely that of a narrow ridge on the upper part of the block of lava.

This ridge was of a light, lead color, but as Louis continued to scrutinize it he gradually made out in the dim light the shape of a pair of human hands with long, lean, claw-like fingers! These fingers were clutching the narrow ledge.

Whoever they belonged to was holding on to the ridge.

Without saying a word Louis pointed out the two hands to Ben.

The latter just gave one leap from the dingey, and, being of slender frame, he easily shot up through the hollow with that spring high enough to seize the ledge.

Upon this he drew himself with one hand, partly using his feet on the sloping surface of the slab and holding his torch in his other hand.

He drew himself up on the ledge, and raising the lighted piece of ratline he held it over a hollow behind the rock into which he peered.

But no sooner had he done so than he uttered a strange, wild cry, and quickly came sliding back into the dingey, in the bottom of which he fell in a heap, half unconscious, with his face pressed down on one of the thwarts of the boat.

With difficulty did Louis secure the torch as it dropped from his friend's hand.

"Ben! Ben! What is the matter? What did you see?" he cried, shaking the youth by the shoulder.

Slowly overcoming the fainting sensation stealing over him the boy staggered to his feet, and turning his haggard countenance toward his friend he said in a husky voice:

"Louis, as true as there is a God above us, I saw my father!"

"Ben! Ben! are you mad? The excitement has been too much for you! Don't say that!"

"I saw my father!" repeated the boy, firmly.

"It could not be! He is dead!"

"I saw my father, I tell you!" reiterated Ben.

"I will go up there and look down into the hollow!" said Louis.

He reached the ledge in the same manner as Ben had done.

But, looking down into the hollow, he saw no one there.

The human hands had disappeared previously from the ledge.

The hollow into which he looked was not a very deep one.

He dropped down upon a small, rocky platform at the bottom.

Near him, protruding from a sort of alcove was another platform, slightly raised above the one on which he stood.

He looked under it and saw water.

That was all.

Then he shuddered.

The idea occurred to him that the man, whoever he was, that Ben had seen was demented, and that he had drowned himself to escape capture.

With some difficulty he climbed back to the ledge and returned to his friend, to whom he made his report.

Ben insisted that the man was his father.

Knowing that it would distress him, Louis said nothing as to his conjecture that the strange being had drowned himself.

"We must find him," said Ben. "He is my father."

Louis made no answer.

He gave the torch to his friend, and worked the boat along on every side of the cave. At one side, to the right of the place the two had previously examined, Louis came upon the further end of the large slab which projected from the hollow, and under which he had looked.

It now struck him that he heard a sort of scraping sound, as of some one crawling along under the slab.

He looked there, but he could not get the torch in a position to throw much light into this small place.

The space was large enough to get the dingey under it, provided the boys crouched down upon their bellies.

"Come, Ben, we will go under there," said Louis.

The two crouched and with their hands urged the boat slowly along under the slab.

In thus moving his hand and at the same time trying to hold to the torch, Ben dropped the latter into the water, which put it out.

Thus the twain, just as they glided under the rock, were in total darkness.

"How unfortunate you dropped the light!" cried Louis.

"I have more ratline in my pocket and you still have a match left," said Ben. "Perhaps we can have another light."

Louis tried to light his solitary match.

But it would not take fire from the damp rock close above him.

"There," he said, "we are now without means for having another light."

The boys, however, moved the boat to and fro there under the slab of rock, which almost touched their heads every time they ventured to raise them.

All at once Louis felt something.

He quickly threw out both hands and clutched it.

It was a man's ankle!

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

"BEN! Ben! I have found him at last! I have hold of him!" cried Louis, to his friend.

The man struggled to free himself from the grasp of the young naval mate, but the latter held him firmly.

A moment later, Ben gave a forward stretch of his body and also seized the man.

The latter said not a word, but in his violent efforts he drew both boys out of the boat.

They then became aware that they were on a platform of logs.

"The raft!" cried Louis, "it is the raft!"

A panting sound now came from the man.

"You have me! I give myself up! Let go of me!" he finally cried.

"My father! my father! 'tis he!—the same man I saw before down there in the hollow," shouted Ben, wildly.

"I am not your father!" the strange being answered, in a hollow voice; "I am a dead man!"

"Oh, if we only had a light!" cried Ben, "so that you could see him, Louis. Then you would know he was my father."

"His voice is enough to convince me of that," answered the wondering Louis. "It certainly is the voice of Captain Truebolt."

"Go away and leave me. I tell you I am a dead man," said the person alluded to. "I will strike a light and you can see for yourself."

The boys let go of the speaker.

Then they heard the scrape of a match, and the next moment this singular occupant of the raft had lighted a lantern he had with him.

It needed but one glance at his face for Louis to perceive that it was really that of Captain Truebolt—Ben's father.

The young mate gave a cry of joy.

"Ben! oh! Ben, be satisfied—be happy now!" he cried. "Here is your supposed dead parent, saved in some almost miraculous manner, restored to you, and here we are upon your raft, with its precious treasures still seemingly fastened to it."

Brightly, in fact, gleamed the jars of emerald and of rubies, with the diamonds and the gold, in the lantern's light.

"Ay, at last—at last we have found the raft," cried Ben, "and better than all, do I find my father, whom I thought dead, restored to life."

Captain Truebolt looked at Ben and Louis in a puzzled manner. He was very pale and his eyes had the unmistakable expression of a person deprived of reason.

"You will not believe I am a dead man, then?" he said, laughing softly.

The boys exchanged glances.

"It is probably only temporary," whispered Louis to his anxious friend. "No wonder, after what he has passed through, that his mind should be unsettled. With proper treatment I trust he will recover."

Louis knew that the best way to commence this treatment was to talk to the captain about commonplace affairs.

Turning toward him he said:

"I don't think we have much room in this narrow space—do you?"

"No," replied Mr. Truebolt, rationally enough. "We had better get out of this. But it is not so narrow a space as the one I was in some days ago," and again he softly laughed.

"Where was that?" inquired Louis.

"A coffin," replied the captain. "I was supposed to be dead and was put into a coffin made by the brig's carpenter."

"And were you aware of being put into the coffin at the time?"

"Oh, no. I was, in fact, in a sort of cataleptic state, brought on by a blow I received on the back of the neck near the base of the brain from a splinter. Perfect devils, those splinters—eh, sir?"

"Yes, sir, they are," replied Louis, to humor him.

"Well," continued the captain, "the first thing I know I was roused from my strange unconscious condition by a rush of cold water over my face. I found myself in a coffin—wasn't it queer?—in a coffin with

a mashed lid which was dropping off away down in a sort of water-cave. Well now, my lads, I've been used, in the course of my sea experience, to all sorts of strange craft, but this was the strangest I ever sailed in. Ha! ha!"

"I should judge so," said Louis, in a quiet, matter-of-course sort of way, so as to encourage the narrator to proceed.

"Well," continued Truebolt, "I rolled myself out of it, soon as possible, and then found myself being drawn under a sort of anchor-age to the foot of some stone steps.

"Ahoy, there! ahoy!" yelled climbing up on the steps, "anybody aboard here to help a poor castaway that's been saved from being buried alive?" I felt very dizzy, do you see, as if I needed medical treatment. Pretty soon along comes a slender, quiet-looking fellow—a Mexican, I think, wearing black clothes and a black robe. He told me he was a doctor, living in a cave near where I was—that he would treat me well, but that I must not mention to any living being that I met him, or tell where his retreat was. In fact, he was a refugee, he said, in hiding from the Mexican soldiers and government officers, who were hunting him down for his having served on the American side during the war. Ha, ha! ho, ho!—wasn't that queer—his hiding on my property without knowing it?"

"Ay, it was," answered Louis. "And so he took you to his cave for medical treatment?"

"He did—he was a good fellow. But one morning I just gave him the slip. Some boys, as I learned from him, had found a certain lot of treasures, which were on my property, and put them on a raft. He told me not to be alarmed. He expected soon the arrival of a sort of little tug-steamer, which was run by two half-breed friends of his up and down the California coast, and regularly brought him provisions. He would, he said, get this steamer's two people to tow the raft with me aboard of it to my brig."

"Ay, but how could that be done through those boiling, foaming waters near the rock on which the ruined tower stood?" inquired Louis.

"Oh, easy enough. There was a certain hour, just after midnight, when the waters were not violent."

"And so it was this medical hermit who drew the raft into the passage behind the iron door?"

"Yes, he did that to have it ready for the towing. But I would not wait. I feared some trick. I got off my bed of matting one morning, just after midnight, and providing myself with some paddles and some rope and provisions in the cave I got on the raft and paddled away. I don't know how it was but the doctor found out I was gone. He came swimming after me. All at once he went down. A shark must have dragged him under."

"Well, I paddled the raft to a sort of hollow, screened by brush, and there I remained, making the raft more secure with the ropes I had, and lashing my treasures more firmly to it."

"At last—it was a clear, moonlight night when I started—I paddled the raft out to sea."

"And the boys pursued you—swam after you?" said Louis.

"Yes, they did—swam after a dead man making off with his own treasures. Wasn't that strange—eh?"

"Ay, it certainly was," replied Louis again, to humor him.

"They didn't catch up to me. By and by a fog came up. Suddenly I heard a puffing sound. Along came a little steamer. She came so close that those aboard saw me. They were but two. I learned that they were the doctor's friends, who brought him provisions—the two half-breeds. They wanted me to come aboard; I said 'all right.' I got aboard, but I kept watch of my raft, which was now fastened by a rope to the steamer's stern. I feared some devilry. I suspected they were greedy for those treasures. I heard them whispering among themselves. Then I insisted on getting back on my raft. They might give me a tow, I said, but I preferred keeping my distance from them. They, therefore, let out the slack of a very long rope for a tow, that I might see, they said, that they meant me no harm."

"But all the same I felt pretty sure they did, and resolved to keep on the lookout."

"Ay!" said Louis, exchanging glances with Ben, "and it was your being towed by that steamer that made your raft go so fast through the water."

"Yes, and most of the time I could not see the steamer owing to the almost constant fog ahead, which concealed her. As long as her fuel lasted she steamed; after that she used her sail."

"Where were you during that violent squall we had?" inquired Ben.

"I was lashed to the raft. The seas poured over it, but the raft and the treasures were so firmly tied that they did not give way. Fortunately the storm was not of long duration. Well, there were two vessels in pursuit of me, but they could not overtake me, for that steamer was a fast little craft."

"I was all the time suspecting those two half-breeds meant foul play."

"They kept on for days, however, without troubling me until we were close upon this lonely island, when they showed the cloven foot."

"They hauled my raft up to the steamer. I had lost my knife or I would have cut the tow-rope on which they hauled."

"But now they began to dispute between themselves as to which one should have the treasure. They had daggers with which they intended to kill me."

"As one was going to jump on the raft the other stabbed him between the shoulders, and he fell overboard, to rise no more. Then the other one sprang to the raft."

"These treasures are mine!" he said. "They were the doctor's by right of his living where they were, and he having perished, as you told us, the treasure falls to me, his surviving friend."

"I did not dare oppose him. He was young and strong, and had a dagger in his hand and one in his belt."

"Resist not and you shall not be harmed," he said.

"I therefore kept quiet until he had picked up one of the bags of gold dust, when, as he was getting on the steamer with it, I knocked him senseless with a blow of the paddle."

"I'll teach you to rob a dead man!" I cried.

"He fell over among a lot of ropes and I secured his dagger. But he had such a firm hold of the bag—his fingers being caught in holes in the canvas—that I could not get it from him."

"Then there came up a slight squall of wind and rain."

"I cut loose the raft, for the steamer was rushing, head on, under her canvas, for the shore."

"She struck a sunken rock and was wrecked on it, going over on her beam ends. Then I paddled my raft into the cave of this volcanic mountain."

"How did you escape that boiling vortex of hot waters in the cavern?" inquired Louis.

"By cutting clear a few of the logs of the raft, and so making it narrow enough for me to draw it past."

"We saw those logs and thought the raft had been destroyed," said Louis.

"Ay, and you have long pursued me," said the captain. "I like you and I like your friend," he added, looking at the two in a puzzled fashion. "It seems to me I have seen you before. I will not hurt you, but will share my treasures with you."

"The first thing to do is to get out of this place," said Ben.

In fact the rumblings of the mountain were every moment becoming louder.

"We will have hard work to resist the current with oars and paddles," said Louis.

"Hark!" cried Ben, suddenly. "What was that?"

The sound of loud, rough voices were heard in the cavern.

"Come on, my brave beachmen!" rose the voice of the captain of the outlaw schooner.

"God help us! We are lost! Those fellows are on our wake!" rejoined Ben. "They are in the cave!"

"They must have seen us, from out at sea, with their glasses, enter the cave," said Louis.

"Ay, ay! What shall we do? If we remain here, in hiding, we will, ere long, be either buried in the ruins of the mountain or be captured by those beachmen."

"There is another way to get out without going back where you came in," said Captain Truebolt. "I know, for I have been here for hours."

"Quick, then! let us lose no time," cried Ben.

The raft and the dingey were soon guided from under the rock.

Then the captain pointed out the dim light of a passage half concealed by weeds.

Following this passage the three with the raft and the boat emerged from the bay. They could not see the beach schooner on account of a thick fog.

They paddled to a sandy shore not far off. Just as they reached it there was a crash like a hundred thunderbolts and the whole of the burning mountain seemed to collapse.

One awful, simultaneous scream rose from among the tumbling, crashing masses of rocks.

Then, with the exception of the roaring of the volcano, which now shot up from one solitary cone or elevation, all was still.

The three fugitives looked at each other and shuddered.

They knew that the beachmen who had entered the cavern had met their doom.

For some minutes soon after the waters of the bay hissed and bubbled, then they resumed their usual appearance.

A few hours later the fog cleared. There lay the beach schooner about two miles off.

But she was not alone.

A huge vessel, with row upon row of guns, lay alongside of her.

"It is my frigate, the Spartan!" cried Louis. "She has lately come up and captured the schooner."

"Ay, now, but this seems almost like a miracle," said Ben.

"I think I understand it," said Louis. "This island is one of the Sandwich Islands, or one very near them. The disabled ship which picked up the men of the lost brig met my frigate on her way from Oahu to another island of the group and reported our situation. The frigate then headed this way, and has fallen in with the beach schooner, now captured."

The boys made signals, and a couple of cutters were lowered and rowed to them.

Louis shook hands with the officers, and learned that his surmise about the coming of the frigate was correct. The brig's crew were aboard the man-of-war.

And thus, it will now be seen, the treasures of that raft, which had been followed with so much perseverance by the boys, and through great perils, were safely secured at last.

The three were taken to the frigate, together with the raft.

The treasures were all stowed away by the friendly captain of the ship, in a safe place, and it was not long after when the Spartan headed for the isle to which she had been bound, when met by the disabled craft.

This was Neheehon, where she arrived the next day with the captured schooner.

The men aboard the latter craft were then transferred to a prison to await their trial.

Careful treatment by the frigate's skilled doctor finally restored Captain Truebolt's reason, which was but temporarily deranged.

With their treasures, Ben and his father, together with the crew of the lost brig, eventually took passage for the United States, and all, in due time, safely reached New York.

Captain Truebolt and his son long lived in a fine cottage on Staten Island.

Ben married a nice girl, and he and his wife received many friendly visitors, among whom Louis Harold, when he came, was the most gladly welcomed of all, as he had been Ben's firm friend through all of that hunt for the *LOST GOLD RAFT*; or, *THE PERILOUS CRUISE FOR A FLOATING TREASURE*.

[THE END.]

ROGER STARBUCK, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in *THE 5 CENT WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY*: No. 1112, "The Ship of Silence; or, The Terrible League of the Black Sea." No. 1100, "The Black Fiend of the Red Sea; or, The Lost Girl of the Coral Cave." No. 1097, "Rob Ready, the Life Saver; or, The Pirate Wreckers of the Bahamas." No. 1093, "Afloat in a Tiger's Den; or, The Wreck of the Menagerie Ship." No. 1088, "The Magic Island; or, The Strange Cruise of the Black Frigate." No. 1078, "The Lost Diamond Ship; or, A Search for an Unknown Lake." No. 1074, "The Boy Mate; or, Cast Away with Convicts." No. 1068, "Stowaway Sam; or, A Cruise to the Sea of Doom." No. 1060, "The Phantom Light-House; or, The Mystery of the Storm Coast. No. 1054, "The Skeleton Island; or, A Cruise in an Underground River."

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